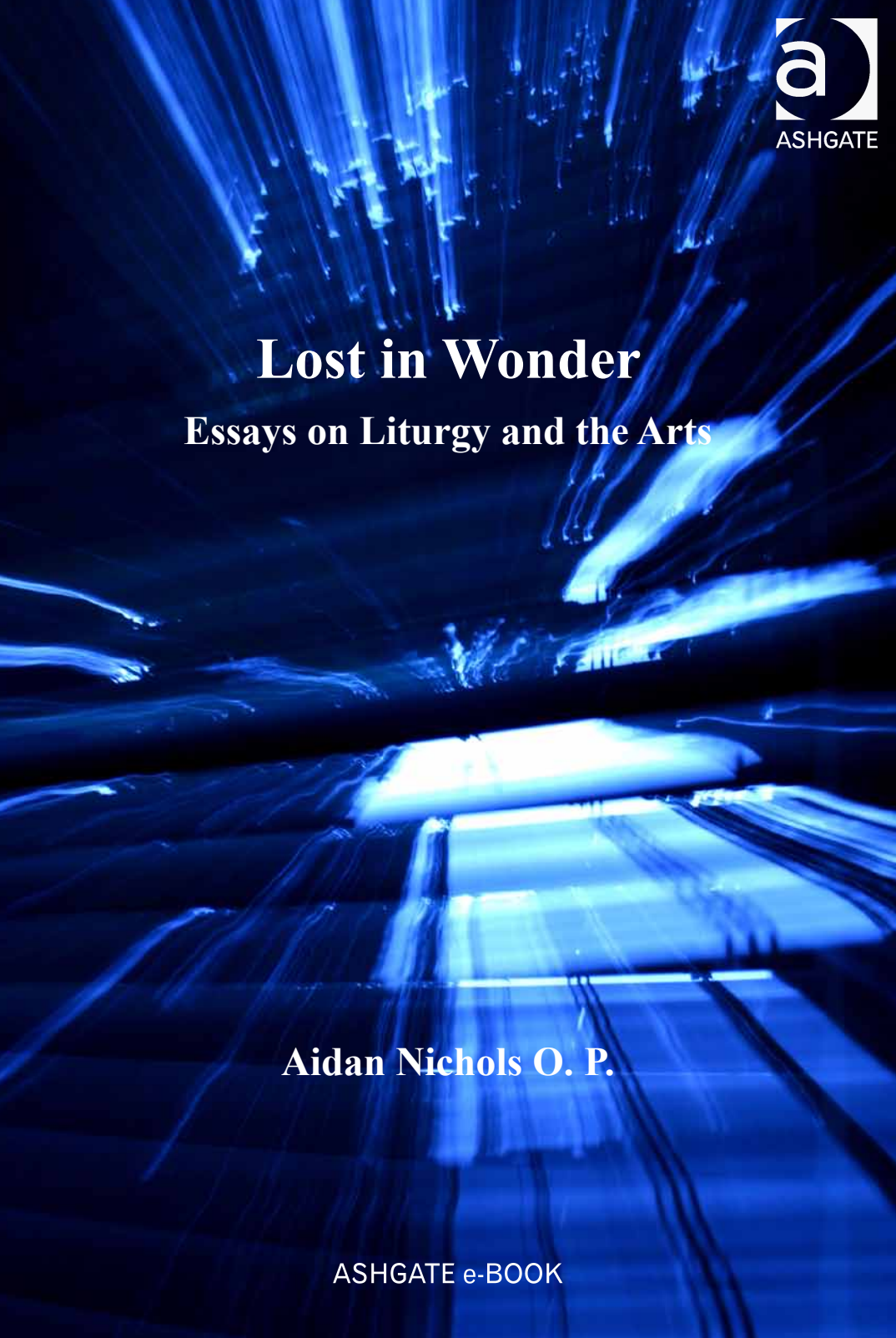
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Lost in Wonder
Essays on Liturgy and the Arts
Aidan Nichols O. P.
ASHGATE e-BOOK

LOST IN WONDER

This book explores the Liturgy as the manifestation by cultic signs of Christian revelation, the 'setting' of the Liturgy in terms of architectural space, iconography and music, and the poetic response which the revelation the Liturgy carries can produce. The conclusion offers a synthetic statement of the unity of religion, cosmology and art. Aidan Nichols makes the case for Christianity's capacity to inspire high culture - both in principle and through well-chosen historical examples which draw on the best in Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism.

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Lost in Wonder

Essays on Liturgy and the Arts

AIDAN NICHOLS O. P.
University of Cambridge, UK

ASHGATE

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Contents

Preface *vii*

Acknowledgements *ix*

PART 1: EXPLORATIONS OF THE LITURGY

1 St Thomas and the Sacramental Liturgy 3

2 Romano Guardini and Joseph Ratzinger on the Theology of Liturgy 21

3 Eucharistic Theology and the Rite of Mass 37

PART 2: THE SETTING OF THE RITES

4 Architecture in the Church 49

5 The Icon Revisited 71

6 Paul Claudel on Sacred Art 105

7 A Theological Perspective on Church Music 117

PART 3: RESPONSE TO THE WORD

8 Dante's *Commedia* and the Role of Friars 135

9 Poetics in the Russian Diaspora 149

Conclusion – By Way of an Ending: Religion, Science, Art 177

Index *181*

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Preface

The words 'lost in wonder', which give this collection its title, should really be extended by three so as to complete the citation from one of Charles Wesley's best known hymns. 'Lost in wonder, love, and praise' is insufficiently concise for a title, but it perfectly describes what should be expected in Christianity from the aesthetic experience. Christian aesthetics concern, above all, the beauty of God, the difference of which, in its tremendousness, from all merely natural beauties is signalled in Scripture by a more distinctive term – God's 'glory'. Lostness, understood in its positive sense, means the condition of the self when carried beyond its everyday limits by being rendered 'ec-static' (literally, 'standing outside itself') through the solicitation of some transcendent good. Such self-transcendence towards the attracting good is, in a huge variety of modes – some bewilderingly unlike others, but then 'the good' is, in its diffusion, multifarious – a feature of all aesthetic experience. I am treating the term 'aesthetic' as synonymous with the experience of the beautiful, when most deeply felt and grasped.

In the Christian context, this 'lostness' has, as Wesley indicates, its own distinctive ethos, which defines its character. It is typified by the threesome of wonder, love, and praise. *Wonder* testifies to the sheer facticity of the divine beauty; *love* to its capacity to draw to itself our desire; *praise* to our recognition of its supreme excellence. In all three respects – sheer facticity, love-arousing capacity, discernable if also superlative excellence – the beauty of God has made itself known not only in creation but, above all, in the work of salvation, centred as this is on the Cross and Resurrection of the incarnate Word, and in the consummation of creation to which the work of salvation points the way.

In the last analysis, the lostness of ecstasy belongs, indeed, with eschatology. Its cynosure is the vision of God at the definitive End. That does not, however, exclude it altogether from present resources. Such ecstasy plays a crucial part not only in the ascetical and mystical life but, I would argue, in the moral life too. It is productive not only ascetically and mystically but also morally because it breaks down the limits of the false finitude which denies that *finitum capax infiniti* and corrals the self within boundaries that restrict its openness to others – including the divine Other which lets all others be. For Catholic theology, the finite *is* 'capable of the Infinite': capable, that is, of responding to the Infinite should it call. In the single concrete order of the divine plan, nature is made for grace.

The beauty of God communicates itself generally in the cosmos – but, par excellence, in the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery. For Catholic Christians, the Liturgy of the Church is the principal act of celebrating the divine beauty (hence the disaster which overcomes the liturgical life when Philistia is made to

coincide with Zion, for the divine glory needs its analogues in congruent signs). The Liturgy is the principal context in which we learn what wondering, loving, and praise-filled lostness may be. In the first three of these essays, by attention to such masters as Aquinas, Guardini, and Pope Benedict, I seek to explore further the significance of the Liturgy, and its normative practice, not least in this perspective. In the succeeding four chapters I consider the contribution which can be made by the visual and aural setting of the rites, in architecture, iconography, and music, as well as, where sacred images are concerned, their overflow into the further spaces of the home and the public highway. Lastly, I treat of the literary response to the revelation of God's glory in a sin-darkened world. Dante is the classic case, here presented with special reference to the inspiration he found in the mendicant orders (to one of which I belong). But we also need a wider poetics that makes possible Christian discernment in scanning the literature of the modern. I have found no better guide than the Russian exile whose reflections I expound. While I may have taken a title from Methodism, I owe far more, substantively speaking, to Eastern Orthodoxy which has been my accompaniment, often explicitly, since my earliest work.

The Conclusion, originally a sermon preached at St Andrew's, Deal, for the opening of the Deal Festival of Arts, draws some threads together in a way that may be helpful.

Aidan Nichols, O. P.
Blackfriars
Cambridge
Feast of our father Augustine, *doctor gratiae*

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PART 1
Explorations of the Liturgy

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Chapter 1
St Thomas and the Sacramental Liturgy

Liturgy as a Pattern of Signs

St Thomas Aquinas, the foremost thinker of the Dominican Order and the classical theologian of the Latin church, is, among other things, a philosopher and theologian of the *sign*.[1] For him the sacramental Liturgy belongs to the order of signs. And this is surely correct. The Liturgy is a pattern of signs and symbols which speak to our senses of the spiritual realities they seek to represent. So much might be said, of course, of any worthwhile art form,[2] and the Symbolist poets of late nineteenth century France held it to be true of nature itself. As one of their number, Charles Baudelaire, wrote in his sonnet *Correspondances*:

> La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
> Laissent parfois sortir des confuses paroles:
> L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symbols …[3]

(Nature is a temple whose living pillars emit now and then confused words; man passes that way through forests of symbols … .) In a theistic context, Aquinas draws close to Baudelaire's viewpoint in the *Disputed Questions on Truth* when he affirms that natural knowledge of God in this life comes about *per speculum et aenigma sensibilium creaturarum*, 'through the mirror and enigma of sensory creatures'.[4] Here we must recall that to the ancients 'mirror' and 'enigma' were closer than they are for us. In earlier times, mirrors were highly polished metal where one might have to peer hard to make out that which was mirrored. At any

---

[1] For a philosophical account, see J. Haldane, 'The Life of the Sign', *The Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1994), pp. 451–470. A mainly theological account, indebted to Thomas but not exclusively so, is E. Masure, *Le Signe. Le passage du visible à l'invisible* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1948).

[2] A connexion eloquently made, and then applied to the sacraments, by the Anglo-Welsh lay Dominican artist and poet David Jones in the essay 'Art and Sacrament', published in H. Grisewood (ed.), *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), pp. 143–179. Of relevance to the present essay is C. C. Knight, 'Some Liturgical Implications of the Thought of David Jones', *New Blackfriars* 85. 998 (2004), pp. 444–453.

[3] Cited, with discussion, in P. Mansell Jones, *Baudelaire* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952), pp. 32–33.

[4] St Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, 13, 2.

rate, enigmatic mirrors must be the starting point for our enquiry, for as Dom Cipriano Vagaggini, principal architect of the new Eucharistic Prayers in the Roman Missal of 1969, explains, 'the whole liturgical economy … falls under the concept of sign'.[5] I only hope my account will not be too enigmatic – much less, in Baudelaire's word, 'confused'.

For Thomas, to specify the *liturgical* sign we have to mention something further. The liturgical sign in particular is to express *the reality of the holy* – the reality of the holy *as pertinent to human salvation*. Because the Liturgy operates in a context where the order of the day is not natural truth but a saving truth which, by definition, goes beyond the natural, this particular set of signs can only be approached by the distinctive understanding that comes from faith in divine revelation. Though, as we shall see, the primary saving sign for Thomas is the humanity of the Word made flesh, in the Church of the Word incarnate this unique sign is itself represented by the ritual signs we call the 'sacraments'. Thomas is speaking in the formal perspective of Christian faith when he defines a sacrament as 'the sign of a holy reality insofar as it makes human beings holy'.[6] But sacramental theology – the study of such signs – does not flourish when sundered from a theology of the Liturgy as a whole. A similar thumbnail description of the *wider* Liturgy might read: the Liturgy is the total complex of signs at work in the Church's worship for the purposes of the divine sanctification of human beings. That is broad enough to include the Liturgy of the Hours or Divine Office, the sacramentals (a word which means 'little sacraments'), and the other ceremonies that make up the complete pattern of Catholic worship – its sacramentality in a more extended sense than the septet of great sacraments as defined by the Council of Trent. It is not good for the sacraments to be alone, divorced from their context in the wider worship of the Church. Nor, for that matter, from the role of sign in the entire divine Economy. To cite Vagaggini again, 'The liturgy … is nothing else than a certain phase of revelation, a certain way in which the meaning of revelation is realized in us.'[7]

The Congruence of Sign in the Divine Plan

For Thomas it is altogether appropriate that God should lead human beings to supernatural communion with himself through sensuously perceptible signs. As he writes in his little treatise 'On the Articles of the Faith and the Sacraments of the Church', it is congruent that God grants his grace through bodily things.[8] When the divine freedom embraced the purpose of human salvation nothing compelled it to

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[5] C. Vagaggini, O. S. B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy. A General Treatise on the Theology of the Liturgy* (ET Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1976), p. 32.

[6] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 60, a. 2.

[7] C. Vagaggini, O. S. B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 3.

[8] St Thomas Aquinas, *De articulis fidei et sacramentis Ecclesiae*, Marietti edition n. 614.

use this particular means. But that it should so do was altogether suitable. As always, when Thomas speaks of *convenientia* – appropriateness, congruence, fittingness – we have a tacit appeal to theological aesthetics.[9] Theological 'convenience' for Thomas denotes how the divine Wisdom selected really quite the *best* means for realising the mystery of salvation and so the glorification of man in God. Wisdom itself – or, rather, himself – chose the human body to be the gateway of salvation. That for Thomas is an example of the characteristic *beauty* of the divine ordering of the universe in creation and redemption. In St Thomas's Latin, 'the beautiful' is termed *pulchrum*. So we could say punningly, it was *pulchrum* that the body be the *fulcrum* of human salvation. The body is the fulcrum, or as the North African writer Tertullian put it in a pun of his own in the third century: our flesh – in Latin, *caro* – is the 'hinge' – in Latin, *cardo* – of our salvation.

The Relevance of Thomas's Anthropology

This raises the question of Thomas's anthropology, his account of man. In a Positivist philosophical climate, such as that of modern Britain, it may seem odd to mention it, but Thomas was going against the grain of much ancient philosophy when he insisted that the human body was absolutely integral to the human person.[10] Though the soul alone is by nature indestructible and therefore immortal, man is nonetheless one single reality of body and soul together. He is, as Thomas tersely remarks, *unum simpliciter*.[11] The soul may be the actuating principle of the human being, but it is the body that renders man a concrete reality. Using the matter–form analysis of such realities he had learned from Aristotle, Thomas stresses that only with the help of its matter can form unfold its own dispositions and perfect them.[12] The body, so understood, belongs intrinsically with the human personal subject, the *suppositum* or hypostasis. This is the source of its distinctive dignity as a *human* body and what befits it for possible entry into the realm of grace.

The place of the body in personal soul-life is reflected in its role in human knowledge. The working of the mind is so dependent on the body for the content of thinking that even sheerly intellectual objects are mediated to it through a process which begins with the senses.[13] In a Thomist maxim, *omnis cognitio incipit a sensu*: all knowledge starts from the senses. Now the norms of human understanding apply analogously to the realm of salvation as well. Were it not so,

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[9] G. Narcisse, *Les raisons de Dieu: Argument de convenance et esthétique théologique selon saint Thomas d'Aquin et Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Fribourg: Editions universitaires, 1997).

[10] In Thomas's view, the *Platonici* regarded the relation between soul and body as accidental, not substantial: thus St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, II. c. 83.

[11] *Summa theologiae* Ia., q. 76, a. 1.

[12] Ibid., and cf. also a. 4.

[13] Ibid., Ia., q. 84, a. 6–7.

supernatural life would damage natural life, rather than fulfil it.[14] It is appropriate, then, that knowledge of the divine offer to bring man salvation should likewise have its origin in the senses. Thus in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae* where Thomas is thinking specifically of the principal liturgical signs, the sacraments, he makes the point that the rationale for the sacraments is the same as that for verbal imagery in the Scriptures, the primary testimonies of revelation. The Bible uses imagery because it is connatural to man to acquire knowledge of the spiritual order through signs that are grounded in the sensuous realm. What is true of the Word of God written in Scripture is no less true of the 'spiritual and intelligible goods through which man is sanctified', the 'sacred things signified by the sacraments'.[15] So the divine Economy, by the way it has disposed saving history, renders man a liturgical being but in such a fashion that this is in conformity with our human nature as such.

In the single most important doctrinal statement of the Roman magisterium on the Liturgy, the encyclical *Mediator Dei* of 1948, Pope Pius XII grounded the not only interior but also exterior character of the Church's worship on a twofold consideration which bears a strong family resemblance to Thomas's. First, man is naturally a body–soul composite. Secondly, divine Providence has so worked in the history of salvation that 'recognising God through the visible we may be drawn by him to love of the invisible'. Here the Pope cites the Preface of the Nativity in the Roman rite, itself a mosaic of texts from the sermons of his predecessor St Leo the Great.[16] This passage of the encyclical is almost certainly a *reprise* of Thomas, who uses the same Leonine text in a similar context.[17]

A Caveat

Reference to the 'invisible' invites the *caveat* that Thomas cannot be presented as a 'Christian materialist' for whom man is simply a 'ceremonious animal'. Indeed, he remained close enough to the Platonist tradition to hold that, in the words of a recent Irish study, the divine Essence:

> can only be known in the most sublime way when the human mind is able to function *independently of the senses*.[18]

---

[14] Cf. ibid., IIIa., q. 65, a. 1.

[15] Ibid., IIIa., q. 60, a. 2.

[16] Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 1. II., = *Christian Worship* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1948), paragraph 24.

[17] *Summa theologiae*, IIa. IIae., q. 82, a. 3, ad ii.

[18] P. Quinn, *Aquinas, Platonism and the Knowledge of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), p. 2. Emphasis added. See, e.g., *Summa contra Gentiles*, II., c. 68; III., c. 61; IV, c. 1; IV., c. 55; *Summa theologiae* Ia., q. 77, a. 2; and the whole of IIa. IIae., q. 175. On the general issue of St Thomas's Platonism (and not merely Aristotelianism, then), see W.

What begins in the senses does not necessarily end there, as the Beatific Vision will demonstrate. In the *De Veritate* Thomas maintains that, though initially it is natural to know God through sensory experience, in the beatified state it will be 'natural' for human intelligence to know the Essence of God through divine assistance.[19]

It would be not only crass but unfaithful to Thomas's world-picture as a whole were we to draw from his emphasis on the role of the senses the conclusion that, applied to cult, the mere performance of ritual activity, by outwardly 'active' participation, meets the needs of liturgical man. Once again, Thomas is far from materialism. As the Canadian Thomas scholar Anton Pegis wrote in a celebration of the seventh centenary of Aquinas's death:

> [For Thomas] embodiment is not to be understood simply as the existence of the soul in the world of matter; on the contrary, it is the existence of the body in the spiritual world of the soul itself. The existence, the life and the economy of the human composite derive from the nature of the soul, so that it is not strictly correct to say that in the human composite the soul is in the body; it is more proper to say that the soul exists in the body – and in the world of matter – only because the body exists in the world of the soul.

And Pegis concludes:

> The human body is matter existing and functioning with and within the life of the intellectual soul.[20]

For Aquinas, writing in an imagistic mode which is more connatural to him than some critics of Scholastic abstraction allow, the intellectual soul of man exists on

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J. Hankey, 'Aquinas and the Platonists', in S. Gersh and M. J. F. M. Hoenen (eds), *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 279–324. Though Thomas's 'knowledge of Platonism derived from a complex tradition of commentators and followers who in varying degrees had themselves modified original sources, … the presence of Platonist elements in the work of Thomas Aquinas is multifaceted and profound'. Thus F. O'Rourke, 'Aquinas and Platonism', in F. Kerr (ed.), *Contemplating Aquinas. On the Varieties of Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 2003), pp. 249–250. He takes up a point made earlier in R. J. Henle, *St Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the Plato and Platonici Texts in the Writings of St Thomas* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956), namely that while Aquinas usually rejects the *via* or methodic principle of the Platonists, he often accepts their *positio* or substantive conclusions – sometimes reaching these by a *via* indebted to Aristotle!

[19] *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, 13, 1. In Thomas's homely comparison in this text, a beard is natural to a grown man but not to a baby boy. Cf. P. Quinn, *Aquinas,Platonism and the Knowledge of God*, op. cit., p. 68.

[20] A. Pegis, 'The Separated Soul and its Nature in St Thomas', in A. Maurer (ed.), *St Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974. Commemorative Studies*, I (Toronto: PIMS, 1974), p. 14.

the 'horizon' and, as he writes, at the 'confines, as it were' between things bodily and things incorporeal. It is itself intelligent substance and not just the form of a body.[21] Naturally, this has implications for worship. When St Thomas declares the soul to have its being 'above motion and time, touching eternity', accepting from that Neoplatonically-inspired text the *Liber de Causis* the soul's situation 'on the horizon below eternity but above time', this cannot be without consequence for the celebration of the Liturgy.[22] Our expectations of liturgical worship cannot go unaffected if it be true that the soul, whose life the body shares, exists on a boundary between time and eternity.[23] Of our nature, we strive for timelessness in a temporal world. Christian worship must take that into consideration. It cannot simply consecrate the world. We are not altogether at home here. We are *viatores*, wayfarers in exile. The Liturgy is not just consolation in time. It must tug at our moorings. It is preparation for eternity.

The Application to Worship

Thomas's own fullest statement of the application to worship of the issues involved may well be a text from Book III of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, where he is speaking, as throughout the first trio of books of that work, somewhat in a philosopher's tone of voice. There, Thomas treats the creation of sensuous things, *sensibilia*, as a 'reminder' of 'divine realities'. He gives a rationale for God's institution, according to the biblical narrative, of *sensibilia sacrificia*, 'sacrifices in sensuous form'. The sacrificial cultus was urged on Israel, explains Thomas, so that man might 'represent' to himself his own complete dependence on the Creator Lord. And the same rationale – representation, signification – is offered for the existence of *sacraments* – God putting in place 'certain hallowings through things of sense' in acts of washing or anointing, eating or drinking. In these symbolic actions, the God of creation and Providence was, writes Thomas:

> signifying to mankind that it receives gifts in the intelligible order from a source outside itself, and [more especially] from God whose own Name, after all, is expressed by sensuous words.[24]

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[21] *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 68.

[22] *Liber de Causis*, proposition 2: *in horizonte aeternitatis inferius et supra tempus*. That Thomas was not merely expounding another's thought but appropriating it is made clear in *Summa contra Gentiles* III., c. 61. For the far from marginal issue of the Neo-Platonist Proclus's influence on Thomas's *Summa theologiae*, see W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself. Aquinas's Doctrine of God as Expounded in the 'Summa Theologiae'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[23] *Summa contra Gentiles* II., c. 81.

[24] *Summa contra Gentiles* III., c. 119.

Elsewhere, in the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas mounts a lengthy enquiry into the virtue of religion whereby we act justly – that is, duly – towards God as the Source and Goal of all existence. In its course, he raises and adjudicates a number of issues that such provision of sensuous media for the God–human relationship suggests. The first of some nineteen 'questions' proposes a general rationale for exteriority – for *ritual cultus* – in divine worship. In its seventh article, he takes as the signature tune for his positive exposition of the issues the third verse of Psalm 83, which reads in the Latin Psalter: 'My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God'. Just as internal actions belong to the heart, explains Thomas, so external actions belong to the flesh. And God, the Psalmist is saying, has to be worshipped in both. The corpus of the article gives the pith of the argument, as Aquinas sees it. He writes:

> Because God possesses perfect glory to which creatures can add nothing, we do not give honour and reverence to God for his sake, but rather for our sake, because when we do so our mind is subjected to him and in this our perfection consists … The human mind, however, needs to be led to God by means of the sensible world [*conjugatur Deo sensibilium manuductione*], since 'the hidden things of God are manifested by those things that are made', as St Paul states. Hence, in divine worship the use of corporeal things is necessary so that by using signs, man's mind may be aroused to the spiritual acts which join him to God.[25]

The Pauline reference is to the celebrated text in the Letter to the Romans so important in the history of natural theology.[26] But for our purposes we can notice especially how, in Thomas's account, exterior acts are subordinated to interior worship, which is the heart of the matter.

A little later in these questions, Thomas's discussion of vocal prayer confirms what has just been said. Common prayer – Thomas means prayer using the texts of the Liturgy – is necessarily vocal. As he explains:

> Common prayer is offered to God by ministers of the Church representing all the faithful. Such prayer should be known to all the people for whom it is offered, which would be impossible unless it were vocal.[27]

Indeed, the prayer of the individual person is appropriately vocal too. The use of the voice excites interior devotion. Through external signs, which may be either words or gestures, the mind is moved to apprehend and to desire – in fact, to 'increase holy desire', *desiderium sanctum*, quoting St Augustine's *Letter to Proba* on prayer now to be found, divided into sections, in the Office of Readings

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25 *Summa theologiae* IIa. IIae, q. 81, a. 7.

26 Romans 1: 20.

27 *Summa theologiae* IIa. IIae., q. 83, a. 12.

of the Roman rite.[28] In this passage, Thomas as it were underwrites in advance the concern of the twentieth century liturgical movement that all worshippers share by gesture or voice – and not only by recollected silence – in the liturgical symbols. Yet Thomas is realistic when he goes on to admit that 'signs' can also distract. In which case, when devotion is already fervent, they should, in personal praying, be laid aside.

Two further considerations are pertinent to vocal prayer. In justice, our body, and not just our soul, owes God worship – citing the rather quaint Vulgate version of Hosea 14: 3: 'Give unto God the heifers of your lips'. And, adds Thomas, whether we like it or not, we shall find that where there is intense love for God – literally, 'vehement affection' for him – there is going to be an overflow from the soul to the body and this will naturally manifest itself in outward ways. Here it is Psalm 15: 9 that Thomas finds serviceable: 'My heart has been glad and my tongue rejoiced'. As the contemporary German Thomist theologian David Berger puts it:

> The joy and jubilation of the soul endowed with grace by God cannot do other than let the soul's fulness flow over into the body.[29]

Still, it seems fair to conclude from the questions on the virtue of religion that Thomas's emphasis on the 'cardinal', hinge-like, importance of the worship of the body is always at the service of an even more marked stress on the worship of heart, mind and soul – which is what his view of the time/eternity relation might lead us to expect.

The Liturgy Before the Liturgy: The Case of Israel

The use of texts from the Hebrew Bible to pinpoint a discussion of the principles of *Christian* prayer and worship reminds us that Thomas devotes a great deal of attention to the institution of worship among the people of Israel, under the Old Covenant. So far we have been thinking chiefly of those presuppositions of the Liturgy in revelation that concern the *individual* human being as worshipper. Now we must begin to factor in their *corporate* counterparts: Israel, and Christ as Head and Bridegroom of the Church, herself a corporate personality, his body and bride. In the longest treatise on any topic at all in the *Summa theologiae* Thomas declares:

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[28] See L. Maidl, *Desiderii interpres: Genese und Grundstruktur der Gebetstheologie des Thomas von Aquin* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994).

[29] D. Berger, *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy* (ET Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2004), p. 74. This beautiful little book inspired the present essay.

> The ancient Fathers [he means, our spiritual ancestors in Israel], by observing the sacraments of the Law, were brought towards Christ through the same faith and love by which we are still brought towards him.[30]

In his biblically oriented study of Thomas's soteriology, *Christ's Fulfilment of Torah and Temple*, the American Thomist scholar Matthew Levering comments on this passage:

> The sacraments of the Mosaic Law, while they do not *cause* grace, nonetheless belong to the movement whereby men and women under the state of the Old Law participated in the New Law.[31]

As Levering explains, in the ceremonial precepts of the Law the people of Israel

> found a figurative outline of the manner by which the disorder that obstructed human beings from receiving God's grace would be healed. By participating in this figurative drama (through the sacraments of the Old Law), they could be proleptically, and implicitly, united to the future Messiah who, by perfectly fulfilling all aspects of the Law, would make this grace available to all.[32]

And this is so even if, as Levering concludes:

> the ultimate reward of the New Law (beatific communion with God in heavenly glory) is received by the souls of the holy men and women of the Old Testament only *after* Christ had undergone his passion.[33]

Thomas always takes a broad view but never to the point of anticipating the tendency of twentieth century so-called 'transcendental' theology which would suppress what is distinctive in each epoch of salvation history, with all that history implies for significant discontinuities as well as continuities in the divine plan.

However, as Levering shows, while Aquinas does not seek to relativise the great turning-points of salvation history in the name of the a priori structures of the God–world relationship, Thomas's reading of Scripture *is* an example of a theology of worship centred firmly on Jesus Christ. The precepts on which Israel founded her worship have to be interpreted in the light of the message of the prophets, not least the prophets of 'He who Cometh', the expected Mediator. Indeed, for Aquinas, the entire 'state' or way of life of the Jewish people was meant to be

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30 *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 8, a. 3, ad iii.

31 M. Levering, *Christ's Fulfilment of Torah and Temple. Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), p. 23.

32 Ibid., p. 24.

33 Ibid.

'prophetic and figurative' of the Incarnation.[34] The Jews were elected precisely so that Christ might be born among them. For Thomas, the life of the Word incarnate, lived out in obedience to the Torah, came to its climax on the Cross, where Jesus's self-sacrifice, perfect in its love and freedom, fulfilled the laws regarding ritual sacrifice and purity that Israel had received from the Lord, and fulfilled too the role of the Jerusalem Temple as the locus of true – that is, non-idolatrous – worship.

A Christocentric View of Worship

As these references to the rationale of Israelite worship suggest, we cannot – for Aquinas – begin to write a theology of the sacramental Liturgy until we recognise that human beings are not only creatures but *fallen* creatures at that. As rational creatures made with a natural desire for God, and destined by a further determination of the divine loving kindness to share his life, we are on a course of return. But it is a course of *impeded* return. In a circular movement which, in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas declares to be the most perfect of all movements,[35] man first comes forth from God in creation – an initial movement that is indissolubly linked to his elevation into a condition of grace. In both respects, as a bearer of his own nature and a recipient of divine grace, the human creature then strives to return to God as the One whom Thomas calls in the *Summa theologiae*, 'the goal of all our desires and actions', *finis omnium desideriorum et actionum nostrarum*.[36] Sin impedes this return, to which man nonetheless still aspires with a desire that is naturally ineradicable yet of itself ineffective.[37] The return is only really made possible by the mystery of the Incarnation, which reunites man to his divine Source.[38] When in the divine Person of the Word human nature is assumed into union with the divine nature, this is for all of us the way home to the Father's house. As Thomas puts it in his commentary on St John's Gospel, Christ's humanity is our way of tending towards God.[39] Redemption from sin can now take place in that very nature where sin was committed and, once committed, ratified again and again. (There are implications here for the *organic* character of the process of salvation, as well as for the way it respects human dignity.)

St Thomas uses the concept of 'instrumental causality' to speak of the task that thus awaited the Lord's humanity in its personal union with the Word. We are saved, for Thomas, not by the eternal decrees which, as in John Calvin's thought, so determined matters that Christ's human actions would divinely *count* as saving us. Rather are we saved *by* the humanity of Christ which brings about the effect

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34 *Summa theologiae* Ia. IIae., q, 104, a. 2, ad ii.

35 *Summa contra Gentiles* III., c. 82.

36 *Summa theologiae* IIa. IIae., q. 4, a. 2, ad iii.

37 St Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, 6, 4 ad v.

38 St Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, 201.

39 St Thomas Aquinas, *Lectura super evangelium Joannis* VII, lectio 4.

that is man's salvation *instrumentaliter*: that is, *of its own working*, albeit *through* the power it receives from the *principal* agent in the saving process, the triune God. Influenced in this by the Greek Fathers and notably by St Cyril of Alexandria, and after him St John of Damascus,[40] Thomas holds that the body–soul unity of Christ's human nature, in its radical engracement through the hypostatic union, is the very means of divine salvation reaching us. From some time in the sixteenth century at least, the Thomist school has not shrunk from employing the phrase '*physical* efficacy' in this regard.[41] The basic idea was taken up by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the early paragraphs of their Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy where they maintain: '[Christ's] humanity, in the union with the person of the Word, was the instrument of our salvation'.[42] And the point, the purpose, of this unique, indeed astonishing, ennoblement of human nature is the human race's return to God.

By his insistence that we are saved through the instrumental causality of the humanity of the Word, Thomas is committed to the view that salvation reaches us through the causal mediation of visible signs – which are, therefore, far more than *merely* revelatory in character. Here, in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, signs are not only pedagogical – which has been the dominant message hitherto. More than this, Thomas is now saying, they are effectively salvific. It was by assuming human nature *for the work of our salvation* that the Logos 'placed himself in the order of signs'.[43] As the primordial sacrament of salvation, the Incarnation will be the basis for the sacramental Liturgy. Situating the two together, the one principally and the other derivatively, allows the sacramental signs to show themselves as images and mediations of the original 'sacrament' of Incarnation itself.[44] As Book IV of the *Summa contra Gentiles* has it, the sacraments are 'as it were visible instruments of the incarnate God who suffered', *quaedam instrumenti Dei incarnati passi*.[45]

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[40] See, e.g., *Summa theologiae* Ia. IIae., q. 112, a. 2, ad i.

[41] The terminology is probably owed to Thomas's sixteenth century disciple and namesake Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan. See B. Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (London: Longmans, 1960, 2nd edition), pp. 334–335. Some would prefer the formula 'real and intrinsic' to 'physical'.

[42] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5.

[43] M. de la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined* (ET London: Longmans and Green, 1930), p. 212. The maxim guided the reflections on art, sign, and sacrament of David Jones, see note 2 above. Though some Thomist theologians criticised De la Taille's work, it was for his interpretation of the interrelation of the Last Supper, the Cross, and the Mass (where, it is held, the Cross would not be the atoning Sacrifice without the acts done at the Supper, such that the Eucharist is the sacrament of *both*) and not for the principle the maxim represents.

[44] D. Berger, *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 66.

[45] *Summa contra Gentiles* IV., c. 56.

It will be a feature of Thomas's sacramentology that it can maintain simultaneously two positions often treated as alternatives. First, the sacraments are signs, and so belong happily to the normal world of human agency – to the life of human culture in its natural setting in the cosmic environment. But secondly, they are genuine causes of the salvific effects they signify, which is only explicable if they also belong with action that is divine.[46] These are not merely declarative signs, they are efficacious ones, efficacious in communicating the fruits of our redemption.[47]

The Priesthood of Christ as Foundation of the Liturgy

By far the most important Christological theme which Thomas invokes in this connexion from the New Testament and the Fathers is the theme of the *Priesthood of Christ.* The office of a priest – and on this social anthropology and traditional theology are at one – is to serve as a mediator between God and human beings, conveying men's prayer and penance to God and God's gifts to men. Thomas completely approves of the decision of the Writer to the Hebrews to describe Jesus Christ and his work in priestly terms. As he remarks pithily in the *Tertia Pars*:

> Through him [Christ] divine gifts are bestowed on human beings, and he himself reconciled the human race to God. Thus priesthood is maximally fitting to Christ.[48]

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[46] *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 62, a. 4. An influential example of a theology of the sacraments which is all sign and no causality is L. M. Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (ET Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995).

[47] Berger draws into unity Thomist Christology and the Thomist theology of the sacraments when he writes:

> As all the graces Christ earned for us come to us objectively through his human nature, which remains forever God's united instrument …, and as thus Jesus' human nature is the physical and instrumental cause of the sanctification of mankind, so these graces are bestowed on us subjectively and in a structured way through the visible sacraments, which are likewise physical and instrumental causes of sacramental grace. Just as God took on visible human nature to redeem mankind, he now employs the tangible signs of the sacraments, in which he inseminates the natural elements with supernatural strength to convey and communicate the fruit of this redemption to each concrete human being.

Thus his *St Thomas and the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 74. On the need to hold together sign and cause in the theology of the sacraments, see L. G. Walsh, O. P., 'The Divine and the Human in St Thomas's Theology of the Sacraments', in C. J. Pinto de Oliveira (ed.), *Ordo Sapientiae et Amoris: image et message de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Fribourg: Editions universitaires, 1993), pp. 321–352.

[48] *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 22, a. 1.

In his commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, Thomas sets out at some length the priestly office of Christ, the divine Word who assumed the wounded human condition to the extent of the humiliation of the Cross, thereby becoming 'Lord': that is, meriting to be exalted to the glory of heaven and installed in his humanity as our merciful judge and faithful advocate with the Father.[49] It is in this context of New Testament inspired reflection that Thomas is moving when in the *Summa theologiae* he calls Christ the 'primal agent' in the *genus* of priesthood. Just as the sun is not illumined but illuminates, and fire is not warmed but warms, so Christ is the 'fount', *fons*, of all priesthood worth the name.[50] Likewise, his supreme priestly act – the Sacrifice he consummated in his Passion and Death, has an everlasting power which invigorates all the sacrifices dependent on it while receiving nothing from them. In other words, *the Sacrifice of our Great High Priest is the source of whatever is valid for salvation in the sacrificial worship of the Church*. In a Thomist perspective, the entire Liturgy of the Church thus shares in the 'liturgy' of Jesus's life – the worship he gave the Father through the visible signs which were the 'mysteries', the chief events, of that life – and the Church's worship is effective only by their power.[51]

All the mysteries of Christ's life can be included here because the Saviour's self-oblation on the Tree, the 'baptism' (in blood, not water) of which he said he was 'straitened' until it was 'accomplished' (Luke 12: 50), made of *his whole life* the priestly service of God. *All* his significant actions and sufferings can be considered as ordered to the offering on the Cross, the offering which will transmit for all time the salvation there merited.[52] Though situated in past time, these actions and sufferings of the incarnate Word, with the Cross as their centre, have present efficacy. The Liturgy draws attention to this in explicit fashion since its prayers and sacrifices are pleaded on the basis of the unique merits his human career and destiny gained him: the goods we seek from God are sought, as the terse Roman formula has it, 'through Christ our Lord'. St Thomas writes epigrammatically: *Totus ritus christianae religionis derivatur a sacerdotio Christi*. 'The whole cult of the Christian religion is derived from the priesthood of Christ',[53] a statement which must be interpreted in the light of its fellow in the immediately previous 'question' of the *Summa theologiae*:

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[49] G. Berceville, O. P., 'Le sacerdoce du Christ dans le *Commentaire de l'Epitre aux Hébreux* de saint Thomas d'Aquin', *Revue Thomiste* XCIX. 1 (1999, = *Saint Thomas d'Aquin et le Sacerdoce. Actes du Colloque organisé par l'Institut Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin les 5 et 6 juin 1998 à Toulouse*), p. 150.

[50] *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 22, a. 4.

[51] D. Berger, *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 69.

[52] St Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 10, 7.

[53] *Summa theologiae*, IIIa., q. 63, a. 3.

> Through his Passion he inaugurated the rites of the Christian religion by 'offering himself as an oblation and sacrifice to God'.[54]

Christ's priesthood means utter ecclesial fruitfulness in the sacramental Liturgy. Thomas never – or, if ever, then (in the words of W. S. Gilbert in *HMS Pinafore*) *hardly* ever – speaks of the sacrifice of Christ without simultaneously thinking of its actualisation in the sacraments and especially the Holy Eucharist.[55] Dom Vagaggini, fulfilling his brief as a Thomist Benedictine, wrote:

> Christian worship is the worship of God instituted by Christ in his mortal life, chiefly on Golgotha, as Redeemer and Head of the redeemed humanity which was to be formed into his Church, his body and his spouse, the expression of himself and the continuation of his work in the world until his glorious return. It is, therefore, the worship of God in Christ and through Christ: begun by Christ, continued invisibly by him in us, through us and for our benefit, that is, in his Church, by means of his Church and for the benefit of his Church, who simply takes part and associates herself in his worship. The proper excellence of the divine life on which Christian worship is formally based is, therefore, the divine life manifested in Christ.[56]

It was said more succinctly by Pius XII, 'The Liturgy is nothing more nor less than the exercise of the priestly function of Jesus Christ', words which achieved a resonance in both the Liturgy Constitution of the Second Vatican Council and, thirty years later, the present *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.[57]

Liturgy and Sacraments

Even in those aspects of the Liturgy that house or contextualise the seven sacraments – the ceremonies, sacramentals and official prayers – the blessings the Liturgy requests flow out, writes Vagaggini, not only:

> according to the private moral dignity of those individuals who carry out or are the recipients of those rites and prayers, but also according to the moral dignity of the

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[54] Ibid., q. 62, a. 5, with an internal allusion to Ephesians 5:2.

[55] G. Berceville, O. P. 'Le sacerdoce du Christ dans le *Commentaire de l'Epitre aux Hébreux de saint Thomas d'Aquin*', art. cit., p. 151.

[56] C. Vagaggini, O. S. B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 135.

[57] Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, Chapter 1. I., = *Christian Worship*, op. cit., paragraph 22; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1069.

> Church as a spouse *intimately united to Christ her Bridegroom*, as a *body intimately united to Christ its Head.* [58]

The all-important role of Christ as principal Liturgist shows itself especially, however, in the celebration of the sacraments, where the level of objectivity of what is taking place is raised to a higher pitch, the interval being signalled by the difference between two Latin tags. Not merely is there spiritual good here *ex opere operantis Ecclesiae*, by the Church's confident supplication as the Lord's bride and his body. Rather, what we have before us in the sacraments is bestowed *ex opere operato*, by the very deed of Christ. In the Thomistic theology of the sacraments, no sacrament bears grace except inasmuch as it is related to the Passion of Christ, the all-perfect satisfying, reconciling deed of God for our salvation in the humanity of the Son. In every sacrament, what is signified is the Sacrifice of Christ in his Passion and its fruits in grace and glory. A German interpreter of the mission of the Dominican Order and its classical theology, writing during the First World War, found in the sacraments life through loving death:

> seven streams [that] flow forth from Christ's Cross, to carry from there to the end of the ages the salvation that springs out of the heart of the God-man [*das dem Herzen des Gottmenschen entquellende Heil*].[59]

In Thomas's *Summa theologiae*, indeed, the treatise on the sacraments follows immediately the treatise on Christology, an appropriate linkage, as Aquinas himself explains, because the sacraments of the Church 'derive their efficacy from the Word incarnate'.[60] This is at its most evident in the way Christ's act of petition and praise on Calvary finds subsequent sacramental expression in the Eucharistic Sacrifice: for Thomas the undoubted centre of the liturgical cosmos.[61] That explains how the Thomist school came to rally so wholeheartedly to the Council of Trent whose fathers taught in the Council's twenty-second session that the Sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Mass are substantially identical, differing only by the outer form of the one Oblation. That is also why, as Thomism understands

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[58] C. Vagaggini, O. S. B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy,* op. cit., p. 117. Emphasis added to a translation slightly emended. In regard to the sacramentals, Vagaggini poses and answers the question, How can *things* be sanctified? He replies, 'In consideration of the Church's impetratory prayer, they are taken under the special divine protection or acceptance for the spiritual good of whoever possesses them or uses them with the proper dispositions', ibid., p. 87.

[59] B. Dörholt, *Der Predigerorden und seine Theologie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1917), p. 119, cited D. Berger, *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy*, op cit., pp. 70–71.

[60] *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 60, *prologus*.

[61] M. Morard, 'L'Eucharistie, clé de voûte de l'organisme sacramental chez saint Thomas d'Aquin', *Revue Thomiste* XCV (1995), pp. 217–250.

it, the Mass can be offered by its ministerial celebrant, and co-offered through and with the priest by the people, *only in virtue of sacramental character*. That 'character' is for Thomas participation – in various grades conferred by Baptism and Confirmation for the lay faithful, by Order for presbyters and bishops – in the priesthood of Christ, the Head of the Church.

As David Berger has rightly emphasised, in the present state of excessive subjectivism in the Liturgy, Thomas's account of the Church's worship as truly the act of our eternal High Priest is of the highest importance. The Liturgy, as the service-books of the Catholic Church understand it, is only conceivable 'from above'. Once treated as essentially established 'from below' it becomes 'anthropocentric idolatry'. No doubt Berger's rallying to the Old Roman Liturgy makes him, in the eyes of some, a suspect guide. But we can note that no different message is given by Michael Kunzler, author of what is widely regarded as the best contemporary manual of liturgiology from the mainstream of the German-speaking Church. As Kunzler writes:

> A share in the fullness of divine life for the mortal creature is conceivable only as God's gift. If the Church's Liturgy claims to be powerful for the salvation of men, then this can only be so under the aspect of the divine *catabasis* – God's descent, 'he came down from heaven'. What happened
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> once for all in the Incarnation and redemptive work of Christ, comes to pass daily in the liturgical actions of the Church. In them there takes place God's *catabasis* in which the triune God assumes the initiative and acts for the salvation of men.[62]

The Liturgy as saving action is 'catabatic': coming down from God to human beings. What by contrast is 'anabatic' – going up to God – about the Liturgy is the glorification of God by men. But notice that, while the catabatic aspect of the Liturgy must come first, it is to such anabatic glorification that the sanctifying divine action is ultimately directed. The example of our great High Priest tells us so. Christ's entire life and passion was directed chiefly to the glorification of the Father: even the salvation of the human race was subordinated to this goal. So also in the Liturgy the soteriological intent of the rite, aiming as it does at our sanctification, is itself subordinated to its doxological purpose. This may seem an unnecessary exaltation of God at the expense of man, shades of a Feuerbachian nightmare. But we see that things cannot be otherwise, once we realise that our sanctification *is nothing other than our incorporation into the glorification of God through Jesus Christ our Lord*. As Vagaggini, again, puts it:

> The sanctification of man is ordered to the adoration, the glory given to God in Christian worship, and not vice versa. The two inseparable ends of the Liturgy,

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62 M. Kunzler, *The Church's Liturgy* (ET New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 2.

> sanctification and worship, are not parallel or independent aims, but one is subordinated to the other: sanctification looks to worship.[63]

The implication is plain: our sanctification only takes hold on us to the extent that we allow ourselves to be carried up into the doxological movement of Christ's own existence, living as he did for what the Letter to the Ephesians calls 'the praise of [God's] glory' (Ephesians 1: 14b). This will be our beatitude, our eternal happiness.

The early twentieth century Carmelite Elisabeth of Dijon took just that formula of Ephesians – 'to the praise of his glory' – as the motto of her doctrine, a fact which suggests the importance of her mystical theology now. The timeliness of Elisabeth's 'spiritual mission' to the contemporary Church, in reminding it of the primacy of doxology, was noted in a book-length study by the Swiss dogmatician Hans Urs von Balthasar.[64] He wrote that monograph in 1952, just at the moment when the Western Catholic study of the Liturgy was starting to take, in the name of pastoral welfare, its reformist – and all too often, either didactic or indeed frankly anthropocentric – turn.[65]

Today, a revival not only of the sense of objectivity of the sacramental Liturgy in its divinely given salvific aspect but also of the primacy of doxology in the grace-influenced human intention of worship is a major desideratum for our Church.[66] The doxology in question is best regarded as what one American student of Balthasar's thought was called '*mutual* doxology'.[67] For at the end of the ages we who glorify the Father in the Holy Spirit through the Father's Son Jesus Christ will also be glorified by Them. As Thomas puts it in perhaps the most pregnant and poignant text of his treatise on the sacred signs:

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[63] C. Vagaggini, O. S. B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 141.

[64] H. U. von Balthasar, *Elisabeth von Dijon und ihre geistliche Sendung* (Cologne-Olten: Jakob Hegner Verlag, 1952); ET *Elisabeth of Dijon* (London: Harvill Press, 1956).

[65] For the situation in the 1950s and its historical background, there are some indications in A. Nichols, O. P., *Looking at the Liturgy. A Critical View of its Contemporary Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), pp. 11–48. These earlier and not altogether happy trends were compounded in the post-Conciliar period by the advent of theologies (feminist, inter-religious, or merely liberal) radically incompatible with the proper underpinnings – Trinitarian, Christological, pneumatological, ecclesial, cosmological, and eschatological – of a liturgical life that is doxological in the evangelical and Catholic sense. Here we may hope *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) will bring – in time – a new orientation. See M. F. Mannion, 'The Masterworks of God: the Liturgical Theology of the Catechism of the Catholic Church', in idem., *Masterworks of God. Essays in Liturgical Theology and Practice* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2004), pp. 1–19.

[66] Idem., 'The Renewal of Liturgical Doxology' in ibid., pp. 236–263.

[67] K. Mondrian, *The Systematic Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroads, 2002), p. 51.

> A sacrament is a sign that commemorates what precedes it – Christ's Passion; demonstrates what is accomplished in us through Christ's Passion – grace; and prefigures what the Passion pledges to us – future glory.[68]

Like the twentieth century Anglo-Welsh poet David Jones, Thomas saw the Mass-Liturgy as pointing more ramifyingly than any other rite of the Church to humanity's past, present, and future as well as to all the mysteries of the life of Christ. For this a certain complexity in both text and gesture seems a necessity. As Thomas wrote:

> since in the Eucharist there is comprised the whole mystery of our salvation, it is performed with greater solemnity than are the other sacraments.[69]

Conclusion

Professor Mark Jordan of Emory University, Atlanta, who likes to think of Thomas's *Summa theologiae* as what he terms an 'ideal curriculum' for theological wisdom, remarks of it:

> The *Summa* is read whole when it is taught – taught to a community of beginners in the pursuit of an integral theology … The *Summa* is read whole when it is enacted as a single theological teaching, with morals at its centre and the Passion of Christ as its driving force, before a community committed to sanctification through mission, *with the consolations of sacraments and liturgy*, in the illumination of contemplative prayer.[70]

The *Summa theologiae* is not the whole of St Thomas, theologian, as the contemporary rediscovery of Aquinas's biblical exegesis is proving. Yet the word 'consolations' for 'sacraments and liturgy' may stand so long as it is taken in its strongest sense, indebted as this is to the prophetic scrolls in the Book of Isaiah. Conscious of that prophetic background, 'Looking for the consolation of Israel' was the best formula St Luke could find for those people in the near vicinity of Jesus who had kept alive the Jewish hope of divine visitation.[71] 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has visited his people and redeemed them'.[72] These words of the Canticle of Zachary – words of mutual glorification and robust objectivity – are a good indicator for how, in the spirit of St Thomas, to share the 'sacramental Liturgy' of the Church.

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[68] *Summa theologiae* IIIa., q. 60, a. 3.

[69] Ibid., IIIa., q. 83, a. 4.

[70] M. D. Jordan, 'The *Summa*'s Reform of Moral Teaching – and its Failures', in F. Kerr (ed.), *Contemplating Aquinas*, op. cit., p. 53. Emphasis added.

[71] Luke 2: 25.

[72] Luke 1: 68.

Chapter 2
Romano Guardini and Joseph Ratzinger on the Theology of Liturgy

Introduction

The previous chapter, though touching on more figures than the Thomas of its title, did not have occasion to mention the greatest of the liturgical theologians of modern times, who also happened to become pope.

Not so long after that event, Benedict XVI paid an official visit to the northern Italian city of Verona, the birthplace of the Roman poet Catullus, but best known in England for Shakespeare's elegant comedy, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Some very odd gifts are given to popes, especially when they visit places like the Canadian North-West Territories or Polynesia – at any rate so I was informed by the long-suffering Vatican Librarian, Father Leonard Boyle, in whose hands various bizarre offerings were deposited on return. But few can have cost as little as that presented to Pope Benedict by the *Veronesi*, and few, I surmise, will have given him more pleasure. The gift was a copy of the baptismal certificate of a little boy, christened at the church of San Nicolò all'Arena, 'Saint Nicholas in the Amphitheatre', on 3 May 1885.[1] The ten-week-old neophyte was Romano Michele Antonio Maria Guardini, the son of the proprietor of a food export and import business. At the age of thirty-three, by then a German citizen, Romano Guardini would write what remains, from out of an enormous literary production, probably his best known book *Vom Geist der Liturgie*, 'On the Spirit of the Liturgy'.[2] As Pope Benedict explains, that 1918 work, reprinted numerous times since and still in print in both German and English, would be the inspiration and model for his 1999 masterpiece *Der Geist der Liturgie. Eine Einführung*, 'Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy'.[3] In the translated versions in English, the title of both books is simply identical, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

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[1] See S. Zucal, 'The Intellectual Relationship between the Future Pope and the Great Italian-German Thinker. From Liturgical Theology to Concrete-Living of the Faith in Jesus Christ', *L'Osservatore Romano*, English language edition, 10 December 2008, p. 8.

[2] The German edition available to me was R. Guardini, *Vom Geist der Liturgie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1922); the English counterpart is *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937).

[3] J. Ratzinger, *Der Geist der Liturgie. Eine Einführung* (Freiburg: Herder, 2000); ET *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000).

Until recently, Guardini's fame has been eclipsed, even in his adopted homeland, so that we may marvel at the title he was once given, *praeceptor Germaniae*, 'the teacher of Germany' – a testimony to the huge sales of his works, to his high profile role in the German Catholic youth movement, and most especially, to the way in which his academic career spanned not only the Catholic regions of Germany, notably Bavaria, but also deeply Protestant Prussia, where from 1923 onwards he held at the University of Berlin a new chair for 'The Philosophy of Religion and the Catholic World-View' until that post was suppressed by the National Socialist government in 1939. Granted that Benedict's *The Spirit of the Liturgy* is, so to say, a 'Summa' of the theology of the liturgy he had been developing for many years previously in a variety of essays, and granted, too, that he saw this work as a *reprise* of Guardini's, with which, as he wrote, 'its basic intentions coincide', I thought it might be interesting in this lecture to compare these two works. What has Benedict taken from Guardini? What has he added, and what, perhaps, has he left behind?

Who was Guardini?

But first, I must say something more about Guardini himself, to place the writing of the book in a context.[4] He was roughly a year old at the time that the family moved to Mainz in the then grand-duchy of Hessen-Darmstadt where his father acted as Italian consul. He was brought up to be bilingual. To the disapproval of his parents and siblings, in 1915, when Italy entered the Great War on the side of the Allies, and the rest of the Guardini household withdrew, first over the border of the German empire to Switzerland, and then to a temporary home on Lake Como, the eldest son would opt to make his future in his adopted homeland. (He had chosen to become a German citizen, the only one in his family, in 1911, when he was 26.) Romano Guardini's parents were dutiful but unenthusiastic Catholics. He reports that the parental home contained no religious literature, nor did the topics of Church and theology figure in its conversation. His conversion to a deeper Catholicism was along a very personal road, which left him with a conviction which can best be summed up in the words: 'the self comes from Another'. Man becomes himself in obedience to the Word of God: an experience of human limitation, then, but of a kind

[4] A posthumous autobiographical account reaches the year 1945: F. Henrich (ed.), *Romano Guardini. Berichte über mein Leben. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen. Aus dem Nachlass* (Düsselfdorf: Patmos Verlag, 1984); the critical biography is H.-B. Gerl, *Romano Guardini, 1885–1968. Leben und Werk* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1985, 2nd edition). As to his writings, there is an exhaustive bibliography, commissioned by the *Katholische Akademie in Bayern*: H. Mercker (ed.), *Bibliographie Romano Guardinis [1885–1968]* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1978).

which, paradoxically, makes perfection possible.[5] When, in 1908, after somewhat desultory University studies, he decided to enter the seminary of the Mainz diocese, he found support not from his family, who if anything were hostile to his vocation, but in the household of a cultivated though childless couple, the Schleussners, who, as oblates of the abbey of Beuron, had introduced him to Benedictine spirituality and life.[6] On a visit to Beuron in the winter of 1906 he had met intellectually alert monks who oriented him to his lifelong interest in phenomenology and Platonist thought (both, incidentally, features of the wider theological culture of Benedict XVI), but more importantly still, the full power of the sacred Liturgy had come upon him. Looking back, he wrote of his first night as a guest in the monastery:

> The door of Compline led inside into the heart of the holy world [of the Liturgy], like a gate to the great liturgical actions … I [had] always thought that there must be another mysticism, in which the interiority of the mystery is bound together with the greatness of objective form. In Beuron and its Liturgy I found it.[7]

His ordination card would be designed and printed there, in the typical hieratic Beuronese style, a sort of synthesis of Byzantium with Pharaonic Egypt, and the chalice of his first Mass was made there likewise.

This was the beginning, and, while never becoming more than an oblate – after ordination he remained a diocesan priest until his death in Munich in 1968 – in retrospect he thought it appropriate he should have been christened 'Romanus' after the hermit saint who, according to legend at any rate, fed at Subiaco the future St Benedict. The Benedictine Rule is, after all, the only historic monastic rule which declares the Liturgy to be the *Opus Dei*, the 'work of God' par excellence, so much so that to it nothing else should be preferred. When Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope in 2005 my own – totally incorrect – guess was that he had taken the throne-name 'Benedict' after Benedict XIV, the philosopher-pope of the European Enlightenment. Only later did he himself explain that it was primarily in honour of the patriarch of Western monks. The desire to reawaken the shaping power monasticism can give the life and mission of the Church, especially in the linking of proclamation to a profound immersion in the Liturgy and the Scriptures as these come together in the personal search for God, is a continuing feature of Pope Benedict's writing and speaking, not least in the address he gave to 'representatives of the world of culture' at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris on 12 September 2008. Like Guardini, Pope Benedict is a Benedictine *manqué*, someone who has

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[5] Guardini would develop this idea in, among other places, essays on the nature of faith in *Unterscheidung des Christlichen. Gesammelte Studien, 1923–1935* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1935), and *Religion und Offenbarung* (Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1958).

[6] H.-B. Gerl, *Romano Guardini*, op. cit., p. 49.

[7] Cited ibid., p. 65.

not gone down that road owing to a sense of a broader priestly and academic task awaiting him in the wider Church.

A General Comparison Between Guardini and Ratzinger

Indeed, if I may interject here – still as background to their theologies of the Liturgy – a more far-ranging comparison of the two men, their fundamental picture of the priest-theologian is, I believe, identical. Both, we can note, were taught by professors who had been scarred by the Modernist crisis, albeit in different senses. Guardini, in a pre-seminary year at Tübingen in the immediate aftermath of Modernism, admired – with reservations – a dogmatics lecturer removed through anti-Modernist zeal.[8] Ratzinger at Munich a generation later found related anxieties had soured his professor of New Testament exegesis, and made one of his examiners in historical theology impossible to deal with.[9] Both Guardini and Ratzinger prized precise scholarship, and would insist with Leo XIII that the Church has nothing to fear from the study of history in its bearing on her origins and development.

But Ratzinger-Benedict would also echo the more programmatic statement of the theological task made by Guardini when the latter wrote:

> The principal task of theological criticism consists in distinguishing from the other forms of knowledge and science the essence of credal-theological knowledge; of showing its well-foundedness in its own source,establishing its criteria and drawing all possible consequences from that essence.[10]

Revelation, Guardini went on, is what makes theological knowledge possible; the Church is its bearer; and dogma is the 'ordering of theological thought'. That could almost be described as a miniature counter-Modernist manifesto – though one respectful of other modes of knowing than the dogmatic.

It is instructive, I feel, that, like Pope Benedict, Guardini wrote one of his two doctorates on the mediaeval Franciscan doctor of the Church St Bonaventure (the other was on St Anselm, while Ratzinger's took St Augustine as its subject).[11] Like Ratzinger, Guardini habitually refers to Augustine and the Johannine teaching on the Logos.

Both men avoided excessive abstraction in favour of what Guardini called *das Lebendig-Konkrete*, the 'vitally concrete', and share a phenomenological

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[8] Ibid., pp. 56–59.

[9] J. Ratzinger, *Milestones. Memoirs 1927–1977* (ET San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), pp. 50–53, 106–109.

[10] Cited H.-B. Gerl, *Romano Guardini*, op. cit., p. 63.

[11] R. Guardini, *Die Lehre des heiligen Bonaventuras von der Erlösung. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und zum System der Erlösunglehre* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1921).

method insofar as they typically move from the visible to the invisible, from the phenomenon to the wider conceptual picture which what is seen, touched, or heard awakens in the mind. Both shunned the Neo-Scholastic movement in favour of an Augustinian–Bonaventurian version of Thomas Aquinas, while appreciating the way Thomas went beyond his ancient predecessor (Augustine) and elder contemporary (Bonaventure) in clarity of expression.

Moreover, Guardini challenged the syncretistic interest of his contemporaries in world mysticism in much the same way as Ratzinger took to task New Ageism and the cult of self-selected spirituality which is so marked a feature of present-day Western sensibility.[12]

In sum: both Guardini and Ratzinger take the same sources for their work: the Bible, the Fathers, and the high mediaeval divines for theology, while for philosophy they rely on the ancient Greeks and a wide-lens scanning of the subsequent history of culture and thought.

The Writing of Guardini's Liturgy Book

How, then, against this proto-Ratzingerian background did Guardini's Liturgy book come to be written? The answer is, in a sense: by chance. Soon after the outbreak of the Great War, Guardini, serving as a chaplain and nursing orderly to a military hospital, entered into correspondence with a friend on matters of faith. One of the letters, which concerned the Liturgy, came into the hands of a monk of Maria Laach, which now became the second German Benedictine abbey to play a part in Guardini's life. Under its abbot Ildefons Herwegen, who commissioned Guardini to write *On the Spirit of the Liturgy*, Maria Laach was the key centre of the infant Liturgical Movement in Germany. Its outlook was patristic, mystical, and austere, but open to the place of the arts in worship so long as they accepted the constraints furnished by the classical Liturgy. Maria Laach was also anti-demotic, hostile to popular devotions, and convinced that the individualistic spirituality fostered, or so it was said, by such early modern texts as the Ignatian Exercises, had led Latin Catholicism down a wrong turn. Maria Laach's great theologian was Dom Odo Casel, though for most of his maturity Casel was based in a sister monastery for nuns where he celebrated the Roman rite with exemplary care and craftsmanship, dying appropriately enough while singing the Easter Exsultet on Holy Saturday 1948. Broadly speaking – and this is painting with very broad brush-strokes indeed – I can declare here, by way of anticipation of the conclusion of this lecture: Pope Benedict's *The Spirit of the Liturgy. An Introduction* is what Romano Guardini's *On the Spirit of the Liturgy* might have looked like had he listened to the criticisms of him made at Maria Laach, namely, that his book was insufficiently informed by

[12] In Guardini's words, in the absence of a widely diffused theological culture, 'Where will a reawakened mystical emotionality find the clarifying "Logos"?' Cited in H.-B. Gerl, *Romano Guardini*, op. cit., from a letter of 29 April 1919.

Casel's 'theology of the mysteries', *Mysterientheologie* – which is to say, it did not give enough attention to the Christological, and hence biblical, character of an authentic theology of the Liturgy, nor to the natural and hence cosmological basis of the Liturgy in the being of man as a religious animal, as attested by texts from late antiquity on which Casel, with a fuller classical education up his sleeve than had Guardini, laid especial emphasis. Christology, Bible, cosmos: these are the areas where Ratzinger's book will score.

Guardini's Break With Maria Laach

The collaboration of Guardini with Maria Laach was to have been, at least for a period, full-time. He obtained a sabbatical leave from ministerial duties and took up residence in a cottage within reasonable reach of the abbey. How far Guardini would have adjusted in practice to the demands of detailed scholarship represented by the erudite series of studies abbot Herwegen envisaged, the *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*,[13] and not just the more pastorally oriented series of monographs *Ecclesia Orans*, is perhaps a moot point, even if in theory he respected and welcomed those demands. The matter soon became academic in the common-or-garden sense of that word.

The issue which led to the parting of the ways was not Casel's *Mysterientheologie* which, in point of fact, Guardini thoroughly approved.[14] When in *On the Spirit of the Liturgy* Guardini remarks that the Church has not constructed her worship for aesthetic reasons but for 'the sake of our desperate spiritual need', which is to be re-made through our assimilation by the Holy Spirit, to God in Christ, and when he declares that this happens in Baptism and the Eucharist, but (in his words) 'all in the continual mystical renewal of Christ's life in the course of the ecclesiastical year', he is, in fact, echoing Casel's central thesis.[15] That thesis runs: by the space- and time-transcending character Christ's divinised humanity enjoys through the Ascension, the Saviour is able to communicate the grace of the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection to us through the cycles of the Liturgy of the Church, where the sacraments of Baptism and the Mass find their proper context. Like Casel, Guardini opposed rationalism in theology. They were in agreement that while theological ideas should be clear, they should also allow of being experienced in a Christian *gnosis*, in some manner of exalted cognitive acquaintance with the realities to which they gave access, an acquaintance and an access expressed outwardly in the Liturgy. Like Maria Laach at large, Guardini was not concerned with altering the outer form of the Liturgy but with changing

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[13] Its full title was *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft, Liturgiegeschichtliche Quellen, Liturgiegeschichtliche Forschungen* – quite a mouthful, even by German standards.

[14] R. Guardini, 'Vom liturgischen Mysterium', *Die Schildgenossen* 5 (1925), pp. 385–414.

[15] Idem., *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 126.

the spiritual attitudes and mind-set that people brought to Catholic worship. He and the monastery were at one in opposing the notion that the faithful should be content to engage in their own meditations while a ceremonial mandated by the Church unfolded more or less independently around them. That opposition, however, and this is what led to the break, was nuanced in Guardini's case, but rather ruthless, some might even say Fascistic, in the case of the monks.

At bottom there was a difference of anthropology. Maria Laach held that in participating in the liturgical action, one received one's Christian identity, one's Christian selfhood, in an absolute and unconditional sense. To speak of an extra-liturgical Christian persona that qualified the sharing of this or that individual in the common work of the priestly people assembled in their hierarchical ordering at the Holy Sacrifice was a needless – indeed harmful – concession to the individualism of modernity. Ideally, bodies and souls, all hearts, minds, and sensibilities, and thus all imaginations and emotions, must be attuned to the liturgical action in such a fashion that one should not be able to put a spiritual knife-blade between one worshipper and another.

Guardini, by contrast, held that at the Liturgy each person should make their own unique synthesis between the objective action and their individual prayer – and moreover that the attitudes to which that synthesis gave rise could be replicated outside the church building, in a kind of 'Liturgy after the Liturgy', at a variety of times and places as circumstance might suggest. A farmer stopping work in the fields to pray when the Angelus bell rang – something a lot commoner, no doubt, in Rhineland-Westphalia then than now – was, he told Maria Laach, carrying out a perfectly liturgical act, even if a canon lawyer might not put it so. It is tempting, if not entirely fair, to call this a typical disagreement between a coenobitic monk in a streamlined monastery and a pastor with all shapes and sizes of humanity to deal with. As Guardini commented four years later in another slender classic, the 1922 *Vom Sinn der Kirche*, 'On the Meaning of the Church':

> There is no Church whose believers are not at the same time inner worlds, resting in themselves, with themselves, and alone with their God. There is no Christian personality which does not at the same time perdure as a living member in the ecclesial community.[16]

This – notably the first sentence – was a veiled criticism of Maria Laach. Guardini worried that Maria Laach was the victim of pan-liturgism, in which the Liturgy would swallow up all religious existence leaving no remainder. He had already written in *Vom Geist der Liturgie*, that by his double nature, man is 'both social and solitary'.[17] Holding these two dimensions together is an example of what he himself called 'polarity' thinking which also, up to a point, characterises

[16] Idem., *Vom Sinn der Kirche. Fünf Vorträge* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1922), p. 48.

[17] Idem., *Vom Geist der Liturgie*, op. cit., p. 6.

Ratzinger's thought, not least in 'Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy', as we shall see.[18]

For the first *Spirit of the Liturgy* the schism of spirits between the author and Maria Laach did not affect sales. A book with more immediate impact than its Ratzingerian successor, innumerable readers found it to be helpful.

Guardini's 'On the Spirit of the Liturgy': What Does it Say?

Guardini's book proceeds by identifying polarities, sharp contrasts, relevant to worship, and then goes on to show how these polarities can be inter-related. The analytic identification of 'poles' and the synthetic effort of inter-relating those 'poles' are what give the book its spiritual equilibrium. Guardini lays out what we can call *integrable polarities* – sharp contrasts that are not, however, contradictions. In this way he builds up his presentation of the Liturgy's overall spirit, *Geist*. Let me sum up these non-contradictory contrasts to which he drew attention.

First, the liturgical rites are essentially objective and universal, the public worship of the Church as such, and constitute, therefore, the ultimate criterion for the spiritual healthiness of group devotions and individual prayer; and yet (here comes the first contrast) such devotions and prayer are not mere inferences from the Liturgy or consequences of it but follow, at their own level, laws of their own. Secondly, the objective Liturgy is the condensation of revealed truth, and as such it is essentially thought-filled, food for thought. And yet (another contrast) it also gives voice to the emotions, but emotions correlative to those truths and expressed with notable discretion, avoiding the articulation of feeling-states which might characterise only a few more easily aroused or markedly introverted souls. Again, in a third contrast, the Liturgy moves between the poles of, on the one hand, basic human nature, vigorously expressed, and, on the other, the fine forms we associate with a high civilisation. Its make-up is at once, Guardini says, 'clear and obvious to the simple man, stimulating and refreshing to the man of culture'.[19]

Two more contrasts follow. The subject that enacts the sacred Liturgy is the mystical body of the Church as incorporated into Christ its head, which means that while independent and aggressive people must abdicate their 'self-rule and self-sufficiency' in this context, submissive and withdrawn people must in the same context renounce their 'shrinking from self-expansion', so that personality types at either end of the human spectrum may be united in a 'restrained and elevated social solidarity', as at a rubrically correct execution of the kiss of peace (Guardini's example).[20] And in a final 'integrable polarity', while the style of the

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[18] The philosophical value of such an approach is Guardini's theme in idem., *Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1925).

[19] Idem., *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 36.

[20] Ibid., p. 48.

Liturgy is exalted as befits the essence which that style expresses – the God-man in us, and ourselves, through faith, in him – and so enables the soul to acquire the 'grand manner' of the spiritual life, *der 'grosse Stil' des geistlichen Lebens*, still the Liturgy does not prevent the growth at its margins of what he termed

> that private devotion which provides for the personal requirements of the individual, … to which the soul surrenders itself according to its particular circumstances,

and which lend liturgical prayer 'warmth and local colour'.[21] That final contrast, which is close enough to Guardini's first, stakes out the claim the monks of Maria Laach contested. The Liturgy, for Guardini, is not about suppressing individual personality.

Guardini went on to make the less controversial point that the Liturgy is a symbol system which integrates humanity's spiritual and physical orders in a totality greater than either. To its creation have contributed, he added, two otherwise opposed kinds of temperament: those who assume that the spiritual and physical enjoy a natural affinity, without which people symbols could not be put in place at all, and those to whom the orders of the spiritual and physical are utterly distinct, and who can bring to liturgical symbols, accordingly, a sense of 'lucidity and form'.[22]

The most famous chapters of *Vom Geist der Liturgie* are probably the three last, which now follow. They are less structured by polarities than the previous sections, though they still operate in terms of pairs. Distinguishing between 'purpose' and 'meaning', Guardini denies that the Liturgy has purpose – utilitarian purpose is what he means, but he affirms that it is full of meaning, and compares it in both regards to *Spiel*, playing at a game. Those who want to instrumentalise the Liturgy so as to make of it chiefly a medium for teaching or moral edification fail to appreciate it (here Guardini marks a clear break with the attitudes towards Liturgy of the eighteenth century German Catholic enlightenment). Those who consider the elaborate prayers and ceremonies of the traditional Liturgy superfluous – *Spielerei und Theater*, 'play-acting and theatre', do not grasp the real significance of the Liturgy considered as a divinely wonderful waste of time. The Liturgy's biblical model is the scene in the Book of Proverbs where the Lord takes delight in eternal wisdom pouring out its heart before God in playful abandonment. As Guardini writes:

> The Liturgy means that the soul exists in God's presence, originates in him, lives in a world of divine realities, truths, mysteries and symbols, and really lives its true, characteristic and fruitful life …[23]

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21 Ibid., p. 69.

22 Ibid., p. 82.

23 Ibid., p. 96.

and this theocentric character of the Liturgy explains how it helps us to appropriate doctrine and develop the virtues. Seen as play, the Liturgy for Guardini is pre-eminently an exercise in spiritual childhood, for the child plays without seeking further justification for his game. The Liturgy (in his words) 'unites art and reality in a supernatural childhood before God': hence the versicle and response at the prayers at the foot of the altar in the Rite of St Pius V: 'I will go unto the altar of God, the God who gives joy to my youth'.

If mission shows us the purpose of the Church, then the Liturgy displays her significance. That is why among the transcendentals – the one, the true, the good, the beautiful – Guardini stresses especially the fourth, *pulchrum*, in its relation to the second, *verum*: the Liturgy's beauty is 'the splendour of perfectly expressed intrinsic truth'.[24] Since truth is the soul of beauty, real beauty eludes those who seek it in a spirit of aestheticism. This does not outlaw the desire to marry Christian worship to the forms of art and craftsmanship. Rather, it legitimates that desire. For the same is true of any genuine work of art: the artist never achieves a worthwhile artwork if he or she fails to seek for what is true.

In the Liturgy, then, in another contrasting pair of terms, what Guardini calls 'logos' has primacy over what he terms 'ethos', truth over what ought to be done. That is not to say that the Liturgy has nothing to do with moral goodness. It has a lot to do with disposing one towards such goodness. By resting in the Word of God whose truth pervades the Liturgy, those who 'live by it' will be, he writes, 'true and spiritually sound, and at peace to the depths of their being' – and courageous with it, outside the church building, when they go back to the world.[25] Guardini wanted a contemplative Liturgy that would fit people for life and mission without their even being aware of the fact.

The Second 'Spirit of the Liturgy': Ratzinger-Benedict

If we turn now to the second *Spirit of the Liturgy*, Pope Benedict's, we find all of these themes touched on, and some very fully rehearsed. Most obviously, *Der Geist der Liturgie. Eine Einführung* opens by accepting as its fundamental starting point Guardini's description of the Liturgy as the play of the spiritual child whom the Saviour singled out as the model of discipleship. Benedict, however, put his own spin on Guardini's idea. He proposes that, just as children's play is often a preparation for life, female children playing at being house mother, male children playing at knocking the living daylights out of one another, so liturgical play is a preparation for eternal life with God. Benedict was not willing, however, to leave this statement so general and perhaps vague. Surely, he thought, we wish to have some idea of what sort of God we are speaking of, and in which kind of eternity. This is what led Ratzinger to dip Guardini's literary cloth into the

[24] Ibid., p. 116.

[25] Ibid., p. 149.

deep waters of biblical revelation from where it will emerge dyed in much more vivid Christological colours than was the original. To put it in the language of the Salvation Army, which is also that of the Johannine Apocalypse, Benedict washed Romano Guardini's book in the blood of the Lamb. One consequence was that, when it came out of its bath again, the 'spirit of the Liturgy' looked far more like how Odo Casel would have wished to see it. That biblical, Christological, and we might say 'Caselian' transformation occupies Part One of Benedict's 'Introduction to the Spirit of the Liturgy': approximately, the first forty pages.

That is not to say that these pages are innocent of Guardini's influence. Logos-thinking is abundant – the Liturgy unites the finite logos, which is immanent in creaturely things and in the discourse of man at prayer, with the infinite Logos who became flesh for us. And before the close of Ratzinger's opening section we hear clearly sounded another Guardini-like motif – this time concerning the Liturgy's essential universality, its escape from the bounds of any particular community or group, though on both points the way these issues are raised now depends on a biblical and Christological perspective added by Benedict, missing in Guardini's presentation.

In the succeeding sections – 'Time and Space in the Liturgy', 'Art and Liturgy', and 'Liturgical Form', Guardini's inheritance becomes palpable again, sometimes on the surface of the text, sometimes in its depths. I take these three sections in turn.

First, 'Time and Space in the Liturgy'. The chapters governed by the rubric 'Time and Space in the Liturgy' take up at the deep level the polarity between the universal structures in which God is transcendentally present to all times, all places – to the whole cosmos, in fact – and the uniquely particular way in which the Father inserts himself into space-time in his incarnate Son and the sacramental Church which is the Son's continued mediation. These chapters echo Guardini's emphasis on the Liturgy as a common rite all of whose glory lies in its making us contemporary with the Passover of Christ from this world to the Father, yet indirectly makes moral demands on me as an individual, in my present situation here and now, since Christ's self-giving is to become mine in the ethical flourishing that fits my case.

In other respects, however, the detailed study in the fifty or so pages which apply general principles of liturgical space and time to topics like the church building, the altar, the orientation of liturgical prayer, the placing of the tabernacle, and the structure of the liturgical day, week, year are more akin not so much to *Vom Geist der Liturgie* but to another work of Guardini's, *Von heiligen Zeichen*, 'On Sacred Signs', which dates from 1927.[26]

Secondly, 'Art and the Liturgy'. The chapters on 'Art and the Liturgy', by the fashion in which they treat iconography and sacred music, are clearly reminiscent of Guardini in their refusal to banish the artists from the Church (as sometimes

[26] R. Guardini, *Von heiligen Zeichen* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1929); ET *Sacred Signs* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930).

seemed to be actively desired, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, by pastoral liturgists), yet insistence that the arts must be re-configured in a fashion suited to Church life – which means ultimately placing the arts at the service of deification, the passage from sin and suffering to transfiguration by way of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. Only so, to put things in Guardini's terms, can art be united with reality in a supernatural childhood at the Liturgy, and the splendour with which an art-assisted Liturgy glows express that 'intrinsic truth' which is the revealed truth carried by the Church.

Thirdly, 'Liturgical Form'. In the closing section, on 'Liturgical Form', Benedict, while more the historian than Guardini in his account of the development of ritual forms, follows him closely, albeit not by name, in defining rite as

> the expression, that has become form, of … the Church's identity as a historically transcendent communion of liturgical prayer and action.[27]

The sections on bodily posture and the materials of the sacraments that end Ratzinger's *Spirit of the Liturgy* echo Guardini's emphasis on the union of the spiritual and physical, or the intellectual and the material, that is typical of the sacramental realm – a union which is at the heart of the *res Christiana*, the Christian thing, since it tells us how to live as embodied spirits in the fashion proper to those whose community has seen, heard, touched, and handled, the Word who is Life.

Secularisation and the Biblical Drama

This raises a wider question, to which I devote my last main section. Sacramental living was, for Guardini, the answer to the problem of secularisation. Guardini held that the rediscovery of the sacramental way would mean the end of the modern age in its alienation from the Church, since the essence of the modern repudiation of Christianity was the disintegration of our perception of reality into thought on the one hand and nature viewed as machine on the other.[28] In his *Letters from Lake Como*, where for a while he rejoined his family in the aftermath of the First World War, he reported sadly that the rot had probably gone too deep.[29] By 1964 he was even more pessimistic, asking whether modern Western man was *liturgiefähig*, capable of liturgical life, at all.[30]

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[27] J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 166.

[28] R. Guardini, *Liturgische Bildung. Versuche* (Burg Rothenfels am Main: Deutsches Quickbornhaus, 1923), Preface.

[29] Idem., *Letters from Lake Como. Explorations in Technology and the Human Race* (ET Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1994).

[30] H.-B. Gerl, 'Durchblick auf Ganze', in J. Ratzinger (ed.), *Wege zur Wahrheit. Die bleibende Bedeutung von Romano Guardini* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1985), pp. 45–46.

Pope Benedict would probably wish to include Guardini's version of the genesis of modern Western unbelief in any analysis. But judging by his 'Spirit of the Liturgy', he would also want to add that people must re-learn, more widely, how to relate to the drama of the biblical revelation, how to respond to the divine agency at work there.[31] I said that Benedict wanted to recover (by reinterpreting) Guardini's idea of the 'liturgical game' as play for adults who are practising to be with God in life everlasting, but regretted the vagueness that can afflict those key terms 'God' and 'everlasting life' if we do not have frequent recourse to Scripture. What the Pope does in his own work is to define those terms more closely by taking us through the biblical narrative from Creation and Exodus to the New Testament fulfilment of these events in the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery – and their further sacramental manifestation in the Mass where we signal *both* that fulfilment *and* how such a fulfilment remains still a promise *vis-à-vis* the supreme and definitive fulfilment when God shall be all in all.

In Benedict's reading of Scripture: at the Exodus Israel is freed from Egypt, according to Benedict, not for Statehood, as Zionists think, but for worship, as orthodox Jews believe. By making the suggestion that the sevenfold pattern in which Moses receives the divine command to fashion the tabernacle for the ark of the covenant replicates the sevenfold creative word at the opening of Genesis, Benedict is able to claim that the worshipping life disclosed at Sinai shows how the created human being, surrounded by the beasts and the other cosmic elements, is meant to live.[32] Benedict does not approve of a theology of the Liturgy which refers *only* to the archetypes of Christian worship shown us in the saving events which took place in the historical process. *Cosmic* beginnings, the initiation of the cosmic process and its divinely planned outcome must be factored in from the start (hence the favourable references to Teilhard de Chardin). In another cross-reference to contemporary theological movements: Liberation Theology associated freedom too narrowly with the crossing of the Sea of Reeds and the entry into the Land. The real liberation, for Ratzinger, is on the mountain, when God shows his hand most fully, freeing man for a life of worship in God's presence, a life which will truly emancipate man and exalt him. Only if there is a continuing interior Sinai in the worshipping life of the community will the inhabiting of the Land be more than an empty shell.

Yet the sacrificial system which carries the cultic dimension of Israel's memory of the Sinai covenant was a vexed question for key figures in the biblical canon, from the pre-exilic prophets in the Old to Saint Stephen the proto-martyr in the New. Was it really enough to perform right ritual actions so as to be at-oned with

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[31] The deep sources of Ratzinger's theology in Holy Scripture are well brought out in S. W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion. The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009).

[32] As Hahn explains, commenting on this section of Ratzinger's book: 'In both the Genesis and the Exodus accounts, a place is being made for God to dwell with his covenant people', ibid., p. 118.

God? Benedict applies Guardini's polarity thinking to these pro-cultic and anti-cultic Old Testament voices which can only have their harmonious resolution, he thinks, in the *New* Testament. '[T]wo elements' that are 'in conflict with one another' (conventionally, we call them priestly and prophetic), at last find their unity in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ where the paths converge, for the Paschal Mystery is the supreme act of worship, but not an act of worship of a cultic kind.[33] Up to a point, the Old Testament already holds the key that will solve the conundrum, or, better, unlock the treasure-chest. It is that incident which so fascinated the rabbis, the binding of Isaac, where at the last moment God provides a lamb for Abraham to sacrifice rather than his son. In Israel, there was, says Ratzinger:

> an intense awareness of the impermanence of the Temple sacrifices together with a desire for something greater, something indescribably new …

But 'now', in the 'inner drama' of the New Testament:

> the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus takes us up and leads us into that likeness with God, that transformation into love, which is the only true adoration.

That is so not least, we can add, because such transformation in love is attunement both to the nature of God and to the character of eternal life: the questions from which Benedict had started out in the first place. And the same Sacrifice of Christ, offered and accepted in the Paschal Mystery, the climax of Scripture, gives us the meaning of the Mass-rite, the Church's Sacrifice, in turn. As Benedict says:

> In virtue of Jesus's Cross and Resurrection, the Eucharist is the meeting point of all the lines that lead from the Old Covenant, indeed from the whole of man's religious history. Here at last is right worship, ever longed for, and yet surpassing our powers: [here is] adoration 'in spirit and truth'.[34]

Here too is the filling in of the 'Caselian' lacuna in Romano Guardini's works, which, in more pious and less exegetical form some of Guardini's own minor writings on liturgical matters also sought, later on, to do.[35]

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[33] J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, op. cit., p. 37.

[34] Ibid., p. 47.

[35] See, for instance, *Besinnung vor der Feier der heiligen Messe* (2 vols, Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1939); *Die Anbetung* (Würzburg: Werkbund-Verlag, 1940); the influential essay 'Die mystagogische Predigt', in K. Borgmann (ed.), *Volksliturgie und Seelsorge. Ein Werkbuch zur Gestaltung des Gottesdienstes in der Pfarrgemeinde* (Colmar: Alsatia, 1942), and *Vorschule des Betens* (Einsiedeln-Zurich: Benzinger, 1943).

Conclusion

I am sure Pope Benedict feels these complementary insights he has added to the original 'On the Spirit of the Liturgy' would have met with Guardini's approval. I say that because of the terms in which, as Cardinal Ratzinger, he spoke in Munich on 2 February 1985 at the special celebration organised by the Catholic Academy of Bavaria for the centenary of Guardini's birth. After speaking of Guardini's sadly short-lived hopes for the Liturgical Movement as a culture-transforming rediscovery of the body–soul unity of man, ushering in a new religious age, as well as his more enduring fundamental option for revelation, Church and dogma, not over against scholarship but in tandem with scholarship, in the wake of the Modernist crisis, Ratzinger went on to praise what he called the 'unity of Liturgy, Christology and philosophical understanding' in Guardini's wider work – the very unity, in fact, which Ratzinger/Benedict would seek to recreate fifteen years later in the second *Spirit of the Liturgy*. In Guardini's synthesis, wrote the future Pope:

> man is open onto truth, but the truth is not just somewhere or other. It is in the *Lebendig-Konkrete.* It is in the form of Jesus Christ.[36]

[36] J. Ratzinger, 'Von der Liturgie zur Christologie. Romano Guardinis theologischer Grundansatz und seine Aussagekraft', in idem. (ed.), *Wege zur Wahrheit*, op. cit., p. 141. Two excellent overall interpretations of Guardini's work are H. U. von Balthasar, *Romano Guardini. Reform aus dem Ursprung* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1970), and E. Biser, *Interpretation und Veränderung. Werk und Wirkung Romano Guardinis* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1977). A useful catalogue of books and articles on particular aspects of his achievement is given in S. Zucal (ed.), *La Weltanschauung cristiana di Romano Guardini* (Bologna: EDB, 1988), pp. 481–493.

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Chapter 3
Eucharistic Theology and the Rite of Mass

A Salutary Reminder

From December 1576 to April 1577 the students at Douay studied the (to them) unfamiliar Roman rite under the direction of Dr Laurence Webbe, who had come from Rome to teach it. George Godsalf, ordained on 20 December 1576, must have been the first English priest to say Mass according to the reformed Missal.[1] If Douay used the Solemn Mass, or the students were old enough to have assisted at such a Mass in Mary Tudor's reign, they may have regretted the disappearance of the three, five, or seven deacons and as many subdeacons, the two or more thurifers, the three cross-bearers, the fan of rich materials held over the celebrant's head by a deacon during the Canon, and doubtless other features of that venerable form of the sacramental Liturgy known to our English Catholic forefathers. An observer of the liturgical changes introduced by the Western Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council might ruefully comment, 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'.

But *is* it 'the same thing'? The difference between the Use of Sarum, to which English students at Douay had hitherto been accustomed, and the newly promulgated rite of Pius V was certainly less than that between the rite of Pius V, even with such alterations as affected it over the next four hundred years, and the reformed Missal of 1970. Still, it is well to be reminded that the *Usus antiquior* or, as I prefer to say, on the analogy of *Novus Ordo*, the *Antiquus Ordo*, was itself once *novus* even if it is closely related to late mediaeval precedents, especially the Missal of the Franciscans and the Roman curia.

Why is it well to be so reminded? For two reasons. The first is that, shocking as the radicalism of the reformers of the post-Vatican II *Consilium* was, we cannot in all honesty call the history of the Western Liturgy a seamless garment, without rupture of any kind. And secondly, to preserve a sense of perspective in these matters, we need to recognise that, by and large, the plurality of Eucharistic rites in the Church is, in the words of Sellars and Yeatman, a Good Thing.[2] Such plurality is, on the whole, a good thing because it serves the better manifestation of Catholic truth.

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[1] A. Fortescue, *The Mass. A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955 [1912]), pp. 202–203, n. 4.

[2] For non-English readers, it may be necessary to explain this is a reference to a literary parody of history as absorbed by schoolboys: W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (London: Magnet, 1984 [1930]).

The Benefit of a Plurality of Rites

Why do I say that? Where public worship is concerned, not everything able to throw light on the mystery of the Mass can be said in words or executed in ritual *equally comprehensively by everyone everywhere at one and the same time*. In his eschatological novel *Lord of the World*, Robert Hugh Benson has Fr Percy Franklin, the future Pope Sylvester III, describe the abolition of all the non-Latin rites in the Church as a form of ecclesial consolidation in the face of a widespread apostasy that turns out to be the prelude to the coming of Antichrist.[3] The circumstances were, to say the least, unusual. But Benson fails to persuade us he realises how much poorer the worshipping life of the Church would be if she were deprived of, for instance, the Byzantine Liturgy. By 'poorer', I mean not just aesthetically poorer, but poorer in her grasp of the mystery she celebrates in the Holy Eucharist.

To take one seemingly small example: the rite of the Zeon, where a little warm water is added to the consecrated chalice, reminds us that the Eucharistic Lord the faithful will receive in Communion is the risen and glorified Lord whose blood is warm with superabundant life.[4] That point, thus made in ritual, is not unimportant. Some Catholic Traditionalists, who view the Mass, rightly, as the re-presentation of Calvary through the symbolism of immolation provided by the separate consecration of the bread/Body and wine/Blood, seem oblivious to how the Mass would not be the Mass without the Resurrection. In *The Mysteries of Christianity* the late nineteenth century German Catholic theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben wrote, contrastingly:

> The glorious immortality of Christ's Body after its Resurrection, far from being an impediment to the continuation of his Sacrifice, is the very condition without which the Sacrifice, once consummated, could not avail as a Sacrifice that is to endure for all eternity.[5]

Or again, speaking of learning from another Liturgy, what about the merits of the Byzantine formula for the administering of communion? It runs, 'The servant of God N, receives the precious and holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the remission of his sins and life everlasting'. Is not that richly inspiring? We might think that the Byzantines, like the Latin Church of the Middle Ages, had good reason to amplify the somewhat bald patristic formula, 'The Body of Christ', 'The Blood of Christ', to which the post-Conciliar

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[3] R. H. Benson, *Lord of the World* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 1984 [1907]).

[4] H.-J. Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy. Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression* (New York: Pueblo, 1986), pp. 42–43.

[5] M. J. Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity* (St Louis, MO: Herder, 1946), p. 519.

reformers, in a rush to the head of what Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*, his letter on the Liturgy, called 'archeologism', were keen to return us.[6]

The Liturgies as a Corporate Testimony to Eucharistic Faith

There is (this at any rate is my claim), in the best sense of the word, a 'conspiracy' among the various Liturgies, a *conspiratio*, a concerted action of the Holy Spirit, to give us a testimony as adequate as any testimony can be, this side of Heaven, to what the Eucharist is and does.

When we hear the phrase 'the Church's Eucharistic doctrine', we are liable – if we are orthodox – to call to mind first the body of conciliar and papal teaching which has responded to various crises in the history of this sacrament. One thinks of the early mediaeval controversies about the Real Presence which lie behind Lateran IV's teaching on the 'wonderful conversion' of bread and wine into the Lord's Body and Blood, reiterated, in the face of early Protestantism, in Session 13 of the Council of Trent, or the same Council's doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in Session 22, which clarified Catholic teaching over against the Reformers, or Paul VI's 1965 letter *Mysterium Fidei* drawing attention to the weaknesses of theories of the Eucharistic change emanating largely from the Netherlands.

And yet the Word of God in transmission tells us about the Eucharistic mystery chiefly through the actual celebration of that mystery in the worship of the Church where the Scriptures are actualised and the contribution of the Fathers is integrated. Though the Liturgy has not always been accorded the full place in the exposition of revelation that it merits, Catholic theologians, from the Fathers onwards, have appealed to its authority. The sixteenth century Dominican Melchior Cano, supposedly the first person to write a treatise on theological method, found a place in his discussion of 'theological places' for *praxis Ecclesiae*, the 'practice of the Church'.[7] Magisterial documents, though essential markers for our faith, cannot take the place of the witness given to the doctrine of the Eucharist by the Liturgies themselves. And by 'the Liturgies' I mean all the historic Liturgies which have been celebrated in peace and union with the Catholic Church, whose own apostolically given guardian of canonical unity is the see of Rome.

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[6] Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 65–67.

[7] In Book III of his posthumously published *De locis theologicis*, Melchior Cano considers how the (largely liturgical) 'customs of the Church' point to the (authority-bearing) 'traditions of Christ and the apostles' which complement Scripture in the life of the Church.

Is the *Novus Ordo* Included in This?

The direction in which I am heading may be becoming clear. I certainly would not want to rule out the possibility that the *Novus Ordo* can play a role in this 'conspiracy', can offer something to enrich the Eucharistic sensibility of the *Catholica*. We know that the Second and Fourth Eucharistic Prayers in the Missal of Paul VI are themselves examples of historic borrowing, one from the long forgotten early Roman book later known to scholars as the Egyptian Church Order and the other from the Syrian–Byzantine Anaphora of St Basil. The Third, however, though innovatory, is nonetheless a deeply satisfying text whose section beginning with the words *Respice quaesumus in oblationem Ecclesiae tuae* is, I believe, a better condensed statement of the Mass as both sacrifice of the Church and sacrifice of Christ than is any one such section in the Roman Canon. What a pity the itchy fingers of Roman bureaucrats didn't stop with the four forms the Great Prayer took in 1970, but couldn't resist adding further Eucharistic Prayers the inspiration of which is a good deal more debatable.

In this essay it is not my immediate purpose, however, either to praise or to blame the *Novus Ordo*. Rather is it to acclaim the *Antiquus Ordo* in the sense of the Rite of St Pius V. I shall be concerned with what we can learn from that Mass-rite – not, however, without occasional continuing glances at the Christian East. And at least one feature of the *Usus antiquior* I shall draw attention to is only, to our present-day mind in the post-Conciliar Latin church, distinctive of that older use because we have let things slip in the celebration of the *Usus recentior*, to our loss.

What we can Learn from the Mass of St Pius V: (1) The Sacrifice

Seeking to address the arguments of the Society of St Pius X in matters of Catholic worship, I suggested in the pages of the *Catholic Herald* that the most obvious reason we have for looking to the Rite of St Pius V for Eucharistic doctrine's sake, is the liturgical expression there of the Mass as Sacrifice.[8] Assuming we are used to praying the Roman Canon as the First Eucharistic Prayer of the revised Missal and are not among those who cold-shoulder it as too complex for modern congregations or too different from its fellows, then the most striking textual difference between the Mass of St Pius V and the Mass of Paul VI will be the Offertory prayers of the former with their reiterated concern with the Sacrifice being performed or about to be performed.

Though disliked by people with tidy Germanic minds, the anticipation of the *Anaphora*, the Prayer of Oblation, in the preparation and presentation of the Gifts is a frequent feature of historic Liturgy. It is even more pronounced in the Byzantine rite, where the opening ceremonies of preparation include the piercing with a

[8] A. Nichols, O. P., 'Reply to a Confused Catholic', *Catholic Herald*, 3 July 2009, p. 9; I returned to this question in a second 'Reply' in the same paper on 30 October 2009, p. 8.

lance-shaped knife of the bread set aside for the Eucharist, as a reminder of the lance that pierced the Saviour's side. Furthermore, in that Liturgy, as the dedicated bread and wine are transferred to the altar at the Great Entrance, the choir sings 'Let us who here mystically represent the Cherubim in singing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, let us now lay aside every earthly care so that we may welcome the King of the universe who comes escorted by invisible armies of angels', even though that 'King' only 'comes' in the sense that the dedicated gifts are now brought in so that they may be offered in the Holy Sacrifice there to be converted into his real Presence and received as the fruit of his Sacrifice. To the worshipping mind of a Byzantine Christian they are, however, already images of the Lord's body and blood, and, proleptically, the King does come with them, since he will come in them at the Consecration. Liturgical time is not just ordinary time: one of the arguments of Dr Catherine Pickstock of Emmanuel College Cambridge in her defence of the older Roman rite in *After Writing. The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy.*[9]

So at the Pian Offertory, which is much fuller than the one I personally am familiar with in the Dominican Use, the celebrant prays that the Father may accept this *immaculata hostia,* 'unblemished sacrificial offering'. He calls the wine offered *calix salutaris*, the 'saving chalice'. In what might be termed the 'epiclesis of the offertory' he asks the sanctifying Spirit (*Veni sanctificator*) to come and bless 'these sacrificial gifts, prepared for the glory of thy holy name'. And in the concluding prayer, *Suscipe sancta Trinitas*, he entreats the triune Lord to bring it about that *hanc oblationem*, 'this offering', may bring honour to the Mother of God and the saints as well as salvation to ourselves.

At the risk of sounding like Mgr Ronald Knox addressing schoolgirls in *The Mass in Slow Motion*,[10] it's as though the Church can't wait to get to the Prayer of Oblation, and above all to the Consecration, the moment when her gifts, which represent herself, will be transformed into Christ's Gift which does not simply represent him but embodies him in his Sacrifice for her. The Bride is impatient to get to the Nuptials on the Cross, to the Paschal mystery, the thought of which is so fascinating that it draws to itself by anticipation what is in a preliminary way being done. The loss of these prayers undermines the way we should habituate ourselves to inhabit Eucharistic time, and, as I say, it also weakens the sense of the Mass as Sacrifice.

I add in parenthesis that common orientation of priest and people is, to put it mildly, highly congruent with the sacrifice-pervaded attitude of the *Antiquus Ordo*, even though Mass facing or, at side altars, half-facing, the people, was not, historically speaking, entirely unknown. Among the Catholic Liturgies common orientation is normal. As one interpreter of the Ethiopian Liturgy (a lecturer in the Major Seminary of the eparchy of Adigrat), has written:

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[9] C. Pickstock, *After Writing. The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

[10] R. Knox, *The Mass in Slow Motion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948).

> Facing the East means that the main actor at the celebration is Christ the High Priest and that the life we receive is the Trinitarian life … In the 'anamnesis' of the Anaphora of the Apostles [one of the Ethiopian Eucharistic Prayers] the priest, representing the entire congregation, says: 'We thank you Lord because you made us worthy of the privilege of standing before you and offering you this priestly service'. It is logical, therefore, that the one who receives faces the one who gives; the one who asks faces the one asked.[11]

I give the theme of the Sacrifice pride of place in what we can learn from the Rite of St Pius V because the entire content of Catholic Eucharistic theology is best surveyed from the vantage-point of the Mass as Sacrifice. Holy Communion, for instance, is best presented not simply as just any personal encounter with our Lord in the sacrament, but a meeting with him there as the slain and glorified Lamb who died for me and has opened a new and living way into the presence of the Father, into the Holy of holies. Of course we can bring all our aspirations, concerns, anxieties to him in the moment of Holy Communion, but these thoughts should always be related to that centre, which also explains why thanksgiving after Communion is desirable, and what it is we can give thanks for, weekly or even daily. I envy the Welsh for the way their language, or so I understand, calls the Mass *Yr Offeren*, 'The Oblation'.

What we can Learn from the Mass of Pius V: (2) The 'Apologies'

Another point to which I would draw attention, and it is especially relevant to priests, is the role of the so-called 'apologies' in the rite of St Pius V. The 'Apologies' is the name liturgical historians often give to the semi-secret prayers, added when the Roman rite went north of the Alps into the Frankish kingdom, in which the priest expresses his own unworthiness and that, most likely, of his congregation when it comes to the celebration of these rites. Although three such 'apologies' have survived the recent liturgical reform – before communion, where there is a choice of two, and at the ablutions where there is one – they are far more persistent in the older rite, notably in the prayers at the foot of the altar; at the moment of going up to the altar in the prayer *Aufer a nobis*; again, when bowing to the altar and kissing it after that prayer is said; in the offertory prayers, and in the combined duo of prayers before the priest's communion and the further prayer, *Corpus tuum*, omitted from the *Novus Ordo*, at the ablutions. Granted the danger of over-familiarity with this sacrament which some of us are obliged to celebrate daily and all of us are recommended to celebrate daily, and the ever-present possibility, therefore, of banalisation and trivialisation, I think we should find these prayers helpful, indeed salutary.

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[11] J. L. Bandrés Urdániz, M. Afr., *A Glance behind the Curtain. Reflections on the Ethiopian Celebration of the Eucharist* (Adigrat: Master Printing Press, 2008), p. 56.

To say as much might seem to give vent to a purely pragmatic or, at best, pastoral, consideration, rather than one that has much to do with dogmatic theology. But the 'apologies' seek to bring home to us our real supernatural situation at the Eucharistic Liturgy. They do so by emphasising that the contrast of sin and grace can never be expressed too acutely. In the Ethiopian Rite, to refer for comparative purposes to that again, the reply of the people to the deacon's invitation to exchange the kiss of peace – possibly, in our modern liturgical experience in the West, the most 'horizontal' or even secular moment we know in church – goes: 'O Christ our God, make us worthy to greet one another with a holy kiss, and to partake without condemnation of your holy, immortal, and heavenly Gift'.[12] That is an equivalent to the priestly Apologies in the *Usus antiquior*. In the kiss as, even more so, in Holy Communion, we have to beware making do with being human, all too human, rather than seeing everything in the perspective of redemption. It is, of course, because the modern Western kiss is experienced as an exit from this perspective, and so a disincentive to preparation for Holy Communion, that a recent Synod of Bishops asked Pope Benedict to consider moving it from the position it has had at Rome for the last fifteen hundred years: in the mediaeval rites, the rite of St Pius V, and the *Novus Ordo*.

The problem with the kiss is, however, its choreography not its location. The beauty of the traditional Roman siting is it allows it to become apparent that the peace radiates out from the Presence on the altar, something especially clear in the Dominican Use where the celebrant kisses the chalice before declaring the Peace, thus showing from where the peace comes. In his treatise on the sacraments, the twelfth century theologian Peter of Troyes says that the fruit of the 'true, proper and sacramental' body of Christ in the Eucharist is the *caro mystica*, the 'mystical flesh', of a Church rendered one social body by this sacrament which has it in its power to create supernatural peace and concord.[13] That is, of course, an example of the ecclesial rationale of the Holy Eucharist, where the *res sacramenti* – the ultimate purpose of the sacrament – is said to be the unity of the members of the Church with each other as well as with their Head.[14] A psalm commentary ascribed to our own English doctor St Bede calls the sacred species 'the sweet food of unity', *dulcem escam unitatis*.[15]

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[12] Cited ibid., p. 94.

[13] R. P. Martin, O. P., (ed.), Petrus Comestor, *Sententiae de Sacramentis* in *Specilegium Sacrum Lovaniense* (Louvain, 1937), pp. 35*–36*.

[14] See G. Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period. A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament according to the Theologians c. 1080 – c. 1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 106–132. The roots of this conviction run back, however, through the Carolingians into the age of the Fathers: the classic study is H. de Lubac, S. J., *Corpus mysticum. L'Eucharistie et l'Eglise au Moyen Age. Etude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1949, 2nd edition), especially pp. 189–209.

[15] Bede, *In psalmum 68*, cited in ibid., p. 203.

What we can Learn from the Mass of St Pius V: (3) Reverence for the Eucharistic Presence

The third most obvious thing that strikes me about the Mass of St Pius V is how opportune its expressions of reverence are for the doctrine of the Real Presence. If we were looking for an historic Liturgy which is strong on the theological theme of the Eucharist as foundation of the Church's communion, or the doctrinal motif of the Eucharist as foretaste of the Age to Come, we might not look in this direction. We might prefer to look East instead. The Liturgy Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, whose practical provisions are concerned exclusively with the Mass of the Roman rite, has a theoretical preamble which speaks of the Eucharist in all the Liturgies of the Church, and perhaps this is why *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was stronger on the eschatological dimension of worship than had been *Mediator Dei*. But for an apprehension of the Presence, as well as of, as already mentioned, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, it is to the Mass of St Pius V that I should turn.

I am not thinking only of the consistently heightened language in which the *oblata* are spoken of, even, as we saw, during the offertory rite. It is also a matter of a vocabulary of gesture. The multiple signs of the Cross over Host and Chalice, whether, before the consecration hallowing them or, after it, indicating their holiness (if made with dignity and not in the way that led Victorian visitors to Italian churches to think the priest had a problem with bluebottles), are a lesson in themselves. The same could be said about the repeated genuflexions and likewise the rubrics concerning the care to be taken about the particles of the Host (which we should observe without, however, falling into scrupulosity in such matters). These gestures of reverence punctuating the Canon, and, especially, accompanying the words of consecration, 'built', as Dom Cassian Folsom has put it, 'a protective wall around this sacred moment of the Mass and [in that way] reinforced Catholic Eucharistic theology'.[16] It was anthropologically naïve to think their removal would have no effect at all on popular or even clerical attitudes.

That concerns the making of the sacrament. But then there is also the question of its reception. The mode of receiving Communion in this rite is a magnificent expression of our Eucharistic theology, especially if the houseling cloths are used, simultaneously to cover the hands and to indicate that this is sacred food which is approaching. The altar is a tomb for the dead Christ and a throne for the risen Saviour but it is also a table of which communion rails are the extension.

We can surely learn from the older Mass how to have a more reverential reception in the reformed rite. If kneeling communion is not possible, then we should introduce the prior gesture of obeisance called for by the official documents.

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[16] C. Folsom, O. S. B., 'Gestures accompanying the Words of Consecration in the History of the *Ordo Missae*', in Auctores varii, *The Veneration and Administration of the Eucharist. The Proceedings of the Second International Colloquium on the Roman Catholic Liturgy organized by the Centre International des Etudes Liturgiques* (Southampton: Saint Austin Press, 1997), pp. 75–94, and here at p. 90.

If communion on the tongue is not possible, we should explain to people that, when, in the ancient Church, communion was received on the hand, it was always in the right hand, the hand of dignity, which was treated as a kind of communion paten from which the host was transferred directly into the mouth, something that can most easily, as well as fittingly, be done if at the same time one makes what Fortescue and O'Connell call 'a moderate bow'. That would be learning from the spirit of the *Antiquus Ordo* if not its letter.

Conclusion

I offer these ruminations in the hope that they may be of some use along the lines of Pope Benedict's desire for a recovery of a more authentic liturgical life by the simultaneous exploitation (in the best sense of the word) of the varied liturgical riches of the Church. We can do something for ordinary parish Masses by learning from the spirit of the older rite, but until we have a more adequate reform, integrating the best of the pre-modern West as well as, no doubt, more of that sporadic borrowing from the East which has been a feature of the liturgical history of Western Catholicism, we are stymied in doing as much as we might wish. We can, however, console ourselves: the only perfect Liturgy known to doctrine is that celebrated at the throne of the Lamb.

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PART 2
The Setting of the Rites

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Chapter 4
Architecture in the Church

Introduction

Church architecture has joined the disputed issues of contemporary Western Catholicism. Indeed, one commentator, the American Michael Rose, does not scruple to speak about 'architectural culture wars' in progress today.[1] That the same author can vary that phrase by introducing, in place of 'architectural', the neologism 'archi-liturgical' should alert us to a fairly obvious fact.[2] The debate about architecture is as organically connected with dispute about the Liturgy as a Modernist church in the twentieth century International style is disconnected from the traditional modalities of Catholic worship.

The 'Jubilee Church', erected by the Roman diocese in the year 2000 to a plan suggested by the New York architect Richard Meier, might be not the worst place to open an enquiry. That is owing to the high profile nature of this scheme, which was intended as a pilot for the third millennium of the Church's story. An external view of the building must mention first its combination of rectangular and curved surfaces with no obvious symbolic resonance; the appropriate adjectives would be 'analytical' and 'cubist'. Inside, the professor of fine arts at the American University in Rome found a stark interior, raw in its geometry, its furniture banal.[3] The altar is an uncovered block of travertine, the ambo a box. No one had provided for the sanctuary either crucifix or image of the Mother of God, so a borrowed version of the one, from a neighbouring parish, and a repository version of the other took their place, the crucifix disconcertingly de-centred in regard to the altar. Though this observer praised the tabernacle for its colour and surface, she implies what a photograph soon confirms: it is a box – another one, if a golden one – with a circle inscribed on the side that opens. She admits that the aspiration of the building to austerity of form impresses, but doubts whether it adds up to a church, exactly – as distinct from a public building of some other kind. Her ascription of 'iconoclastic tendencies' to its architect, a secular Jew, would not necessarily be denied by their object. Meier argued that, had the diocese of Rome wanted a traditional church, they would not have invited him in particular to enter the

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[1] M. S. Rose, *In Tiers of Glory. The Organic Development of Catholic Church Architecture through the Ages* (Cincinnati: Mesa Folio Editions, 2004), p. 109.

[2] Ibid., p. 102.

[3] B. Ennis, 'A Vacuum in the Spirit. The Design of the Jubilee Church in Rome', *Sacred Architecture* 9 (2004), pp. 10–13.

competition to design it.[4] That is a perfectly reasonable point. A defining feature of the Modern movement in architecture is to sever, of set purpose, all nostalgic ties with the past of a tradition.[5]

As the year 2000 came and went, so it happens, an English Jesuit was working on a comprehensive study of probably the greatest of the twentieth century's liturgical architects, John Ninian Comper, whose vision and technique could hardly stand in sharper contrast to Meier's. Father Anthony Symondson's biography of Comper is still awaited, but his study of Comper's approach to building a church has already appeared.[6] It is not only a fastidiously researched, excellently written and superbly illustrated study (from black and white photographs, many of them early, of these buildings). It is also a declaration of war. For Symondson, architectural Modernism has

> resulted in a rash of mediocre churches and the ruination of many old ones which depress their congregations, starve them of transcendence in worship, and deprive them of a sense of place.[7]

The importance of Comper is that

> more than any other English church architect of the twentieth century, [he] endeavoured with passionate conviction to penetrate to the very core of Western civilization by studying the church art and architecture of Europe to find there spiritual values applicable to his own time.[8]

The 'ideological *impasse* in which modern church architecture sleeps' could be overcome with no compromise of liturgical principle if Comper's understanding not only of the 'indispensability of beauty' but, more specifically, of the 'legacy of Christian tradition' were renewed.[9] If I say that the overall effect of text and photographs in this book comes as a revelation, I shall also be declaring an interest. What follows in this essay is an attempt to second Father Symondson's plea, notably by bringing into consort some voices harmonious with his, mainly – but not exclusively – from the United States.

The ground of my partisanship lies in the history of the subject – namely, sacred space as envisaged in Church tradition. Any visit to that history, with a

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4 Cited in M. S. Rose, *In Tiers of Glory*, op. cit., pp. 103–104.

5 D. Watkin, *Morality and Architecture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); idem., *Morality and Architecture Revisited* (London: John Murray, 2001).

6 A. Symondson, S. J., and S. A. Bucknall, *Sir Ninian Comper. An Introduction to his Life and Work, with Complete Gazetteer* (Reading: Spire Books, 2006). Mr Bucknall's contribution took the form of the Gazetteer.

7 Ibid., p. 227.

8 Ibid., p. 228.

9 Ibid.

view to drawing out pertinent principles, will prove hard to reconcile with those radically innovatory twentieth century buildings that reject both structure and content as found in pre-twentieth century use.

Some Principles

We can note first the importance of the church building for traditional Christendom. It is hardly to be overestimated. Vera Shevzov writes of Russian Christian attitudes:

> Given the meanings ascribed to the temple [i.e. church building], it is not surprising that Orthodox writers and preachers considered it an essential aspect of the Christian life. Without the temple, they maintained, there could be no salvation, since only it could facilitate the formation of the inner spiritual temple. Insofar as believers strove toward union and communion with God, by their nature they needed the structure and stimulus of matter. The church building provided the primary source of nourishment and healing for the human soul in its journey toward God.[10]

That tells us of the vital place of the church building, albeit in an idiom somewhat uncertainly positioned between religious rhetoric and social anthropology. Shevzov's statement needs supplementing by a more theological definition of what a church *is*. For any reality, after all, ontology underlies function. Preferably, such a definition should draw on both Western and Eastern emphases since although our interest, like the problem, is Occidental, the Church here as elsewhere cannot be healthful unless she also breathes with her Oriental 'lung'.

Writing as an Anglo-Catholic with Rome-ward inclinations,[11] Comper comes obligingly to our aid. His prose has late Edwardian lushness but the saturated quality of this particular passage turns on its richness of allusion to Bible and Tradition.

> [A church] is a building which enshrines the altar of Him who dwelleth not in temples made with hands and who yet has made there His Covenanted Presence on earth. It is the centre of Worship in every community of men who recognize Christ as the *Pantokrator*, the Almighty, the Ruler and Creator of all things: at its altar is pleaded the daily Sacrifice in complete union with the Church Triumphant in Heaven, of which He is the one and only Head, the High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech.[12]

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[10] V. Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 69–70.

[11] A. Symondson, S. J., and S. A. Bucknall, *Sir Ninian Comper*, op. cit., p. 186.

[12] J. N. Comper, *Of the Atmosphere of a Church* (London: Sheldon Press, 1947), p. 8. This essay is conveniently reprinted in A. Symondson, S. J., and S. A. Bucknall, *Sir Ninian*

Comper goes on to emphasise the *catholic* – that is, the ecclesial and cosmic – character of the church building, to the point of arguing that 'a Protestant church' (as distinct from meeting-house for preaching) is a contradiction in terms. Only a high doctrine of the ecclesial mystery can explain the existence of the historic church building of traditional Christendom and the attention paid it by the community.

> A church built with hands … is the outward expression here on earth of that spiritual Church built of living stones, the Bride of Christ, *Urbs beata Jerusalem*, which stretches back to the foundation of the world and onwards to all eternity. With her Lord she lays claim to the whole of His Creation … And so the temple here on earth, in different lands and in different shapes, in the East and in the West, has developed or added to itself fresh forms of beauty and, though it has suffered from iconoclasts and destroyers both within and without, … it has never broken with the past, it has never renounced its claims to continuity.[13]

In his keynote essay 'Of the Atmosphere of a Church' from which I have been quoting, Comper infers from such a conception that 'it must … reduce to folly' the terms 'self-expression' and 'the expression of the age', and most notably so when they are 'used to cover such incapacity and ugliness as every age has in turn rejected'. And he inquires, pointedly, 'Is there such a supremacy of goodness, beauty and truth in the present age as to mark it as distinct from the past, and demand that we invent a new expression of it?'[14] A saint or mystic may pass directly to God without any need for the outward beauties of art, or nature for that matter. Most people cannot.

Comper stresses the eschatological setting of worship.

> The note of a church should be, not that of novelty, but of eternity. Like the Liturgy celebrated within it, the measure of its greatness will be the measure in which it succeeds in eliminating time and producing the atmosphere of heavenly worship. This is the characteristic of the earliest art of the Church, in liturgy, in architecture and in plastic decoration, and it is the tradition of all subsequent ages.[15]

This need exclude no genuinely 'beautiful style'. But the basic lay-out must be 'in accord with the requirements of the liturgy and the pastoral needs of those who worship within it', while 'the imagery [found within it] must express the balanced measure of the faith'. For these purposes it is necessary to 'look to tradition'. It is no more satisfactory to suppose, so Comper argues, that one can properly interpret these needs without reference to tradition than were we to neglect tradition in interpreting

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Comper, op. cit., pp. 231–246.

13 J. N. Comper, *Of the Atmosphere of a Church*, op. cit., p. 9.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 10.

the New Testament or the Creeds of the Church. Anti-traditionalists are, generally speaking, consistent since 'modernism in art is the natural expression of modernism in doctrine, and it is quite true they are both the expression of the age, but of one side of it only'. And Comper goes on with frightening prescience: 'Rome has condemned modernist doctrine, but has not yet condemned its expression in art. The attraction of the modernistic is still too strong'.[16]

Contemporary Difficulties

It would be hard to imagine a manifesto in more brutal contradiction to Comper's principles than the United States Bishops' Conference Committee on the Liturgy document *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, produced exactly thirty years after he wrote. The 1978 text declared the assembly of believers the most important 'symbol with which the liturgy deals'. The document thus relegates all other elements of Catholic worship – not only the ordained ministry but the rites themselves, and so, inevitably, their artistic and architectural elaboration – to a secondary status.[17] In due course, this text stimulated a robust counter-reaction in the American church.

Thus, for instance, the liturgical theologian Francis Mannion found behind its extraordinary choice of controlling option an attitude he called theological 'experiential-expressivism'. That is his term for a situation where liturgical forms serve chiefly to express the inspirations of a group. The role of art in exploring, after the manner (we might add) of Comper, the 'Christologically founded rites' of the Church's 'sacramental order' can only have the most precarious future, so Mannion opined, if such a view of the Church's worship should come to prevail.

The most frequent visual embodiment of 'experiential-expressivism', at least in North America, is probably the domestication of church interiors. The only 'model' appeal to group self-expression can readily find in the paradigm contemporary Western culture turns out to be the living room or, more institutionally, the doctor's waiting room or, yet again, the hotel foyer. Comfortable or plush, these have it in common that they are always tame. Such accommodation to secular space is hardly unknown in Britain either. In the words of one English commentator (like Comper, an Anglo-Catholic, at least at the time of writing): 'The sanctuary became less a place to worship God

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16 Ibid., p. 11.

17 M. F. Mannion, 'Beyond Environment and Art in Catholic Worship', *Antiphon* 4: 2 (1999), pp. 2–4, 7, and here at p. 2. An expanded version appeared as 'Towards a New Era in Liturgical Architecture', in idem., *Masterworks of God. Essays in Liturgical Theory and Practice* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2004), pp. 144–175.

than the apotheosis of 1960s man's homage to G-Plan furnishing and his own immanence'.[18] Mannion's critique was equally severe, if more soberly expressed.

> The kind of hospitality appropriate to worship is not psychological intimacy in the ordinary cultural sense: it is theological intimacy, that is, the bonding of persons of all degrees of relationship by their participation in the trinitarian life of God through sacramental initiation. By the same token, transcendence does not mean divine remoteness from the communal, but the embodiment of divine glory in communal events.[19]

An alternative organisation of space to the domestic could bear a closer resemblance to the garage. But, as the closing sentence of this citation indicates, the *Bauhaus* style of stripped down simplicity is scarcely more helpful than *Biedermeier* cosiness. In total if unwitting conformity with Comper's essay, Mannion comments: 'there exists considerable difficulty in reconciling the principles of aesthetic modernism and those of the sacramental tradition of Catholicism'.[20]

That is the artifice of under-statement. How can they *possibly* be reconciled if architectural Modernism seeks, as it does, to expunge symbolism and memory whereas the sacramental sensibility of Catholicism is founded on precisely these things? Helpfully, Mannion points for guidance to the post-Conciliar rite for the Dedication of a Church and Altar and the relevant sections of the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.[21] Given the Second Vatican Council's movement of *ressourcement* in matters of early Christian Liturgy, it was certainly extraordinary that the bishops and *periti* expressed so little interest in the recovery of the forms of ancient Christian architecture and art, forms which are the matrix of all the subsequently developed styles the Church has known. In the post-Conciliar period, some assistance was granted, however, to the recovery of sanity by these ceremonial and catechetical documents.

In the year 2000 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States approved a replacement set of guidelines for *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. *Built of Living Stones*, for such was its title, represents a considerable advance on its predecessor. It does so by conceiving the church building as chiefly in function of the Church's rites. But there is a price to be paid in terms of devotional purposes, as distinct from liturgical goals strictly so defined.[22] For the document did not do justice to a swingeing – but not wholly

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[18] R. Low, 'Go East, Young Man', *New Directions* (2001), pp. 17–19, and here at p. 17.

[19] M. F. Mannion, 'Beyond Environment and Art in Catholic Worship', art. cit., p. 4.

[20] Ibid., p. 3.

[21] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1179–1186; 1197–1199; 1667–1770.

[22] Thus T. V. Vaverek, 'The Church Building and Participation in the Paschal Mystery: Assessing the NCCB Document Built of Living Stones', *Sacred Architecture* 5 (2001), pp. 10–15.

unjustified – judgment passed by the Swiss dogmatician Hans Urs von Balthasar on how we live now.

> Only in an age when man gives up his personal prayer and contents himself with being simply a communal animal in the church can one design churches which are determined purely functionally by the services of the congregation.[23]

The Need for Re-Iconisation

Steven Schloeder is an American architect who takes as his points of reference the dedication rites and the *Catechism*, as well as texts from the Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II. What he terms Modernist 'whitewashed barns' – examples such as the Fronleichnamkirche at Aachen, date from so early as the late 1920s[24] – proved, he reports, influential models for re-ordered, as well as newly built, churches in the post-Conciliar epoch. The emphasis of the Modernist movement on 'universal space' tallied only too well with the anti-hierarchical communitarianism which was a temptation of the mid-twentieth-century liturgical movement, just as aesthetic reductivism dovetailed into notions of liturgical simplicity. The ruling maxim became 'assembly is all'. Emphasis on the meal-aspect of the Eucharist at the expense of its more primordial sacrificial dimension[25] – the 'meal' is enjoyment of the fruits of the sacrifice – followed naturally. In their worst, i.e. their most consistent, examples, writes Schloeder:

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[23] Cited from Balthasar's essay 'Unmodern Prayer' in D. Stancliffe, [review of] Richard S. Vosko, *God's House in our House: Re-imagining the Environment for Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), in *Art and Christianity* 48 (2006), p. 14.

[24] Dating from the years 1928–1930, its creator, Rudolf Schwartz, a friend both of the father of architectural Modernism Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and of the theologian Romano Guardini, sought to provide a theological interpretation of his otherwise symbolically minimalist churches (relating different ground-plans for them to Christ's pre-existence, life, Passion and Parousia) but did so in idiosyncratic, and possibly heterodox, fashion quite unrelated to the previous history of Catholic church architecture: see S. J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion. Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), pp. 234–238. Schwarz's manifesto, *Vom Bau der Kirche* (Heidelberg: L. Schneider, 1947, 2nd edition) was translated into English as *The Church Incarnate. The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1958). A benign interpretation is found in W. Zahner, *Rudolf Schwarz: Baumeister der neuen Gemeinde. Ein Beitrag zum Gespräch zwischen Liturgietheologie und Architektur in der liturgischen Bewegung* (Altenberge: Oros, 1992). Cooler is T. Hasler, *Architektur als Ausdruck – Rudolf Schwarz* (Zurich: GTA/Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2000).

[25] Cf. John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, 9: 'The Eucharist is above all else a sacrifice'.

> [The Modernists'] buildings have been incapable of addressing the deeper, mystical knowledge of the faith, much less the human soul's yearning for the mystery of transcendent beauty. Rather, they have fallen into a reductionist mentality, stripping the churches of those elements, symbols, and images that speak to the human heart. Their buildings speak only of the immanent – even as their liturgies studiously avoid the transcendent to dwell on the 'gathered assembly' – and thus have departed from the theological and anthropological underpinnings of the traditional understanding of Catholic church architecture.[26]

By the early 1960s, some commentators were resigned to soulless churches as all that a supposedly inescapable architectural modernity could provide. 'Apart from the community which gathers in these churches', wrote R. Kevin Seasoltz with seeming equanimity, 'the buildings have little meaning'.[27]

For Schloeder, in striking contrast, *the church building is an icon of the spiritual reality of the Church*.[28] Here he has, I believe, rightly identified the nodal issue. Schloeder outlines briefly how in East and West this 'iconic' character of the church-building worked out. Given the authoritative role of Church tradition in these matters, this is in fact an indispensable exercise.

For the East: drawing on such Fathers as Theodore of Mopsuestia, Maximus Confessor, and Germanus of Constantinople as well as later divines like Nicholas of Andida, Nicholas Cabasilas, and Symeon of Thessalonica, Schloeder produces an overall identikit Byzantine interpretation of the church building. At the church entrance, the narthex signifies the unredeemed world: here in early times the catechumens and penitents foregathered. By contrast, the *naos* or central space represents the redeemed world crowned by a dome whose primary task is to recall the heavens, where Christ the Pantokrator, figured there, sits in his risen humanity at the Father's right, holding all things together in heaven and on earth. But, writes Schloeder:

> the dome also gives a sense of immanence, and suggests that the *naos* is also the Womb of the Virgin, as well as the Holy Cave of Bethlehem and the Holy Cave of the Sepulchre. Thus the building evokes many images of places where the Spirit vivifies the Church, which is born into the world, and redeemed into the Glory of the Lord.[29]

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[26] S. J. Schloeder, 'What Happened to Church Architecture?', *Second Spring* (March 1995), pp. 27–38 and here at p. 29. Schloeder's criticisms, as well as his positive proposals, were set out at much greater length three years later in his *Architecture in Communion*. See note 24 above.

[27] R. K. Seasoltz, *The House of God* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), pp. 125–126.

[28] S. J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion*, op. cit., pp. 168–224, a chapter entitled 'Domus Dei: the Church as Icon'.

[29] S. Schloeder, 'What Happened to Church Architecture?', art. cit., p. 30.

Continuing his analysis, Schloeder describes the developed icon screen of late mediaeval and modern Byzantine-Slav churches as veiling the sanctuary which is 'the fulfilment of the Mercy Seat of the Mosaic tabernacle, … the perfection of [the] Holy of Holies, and … even the sacramental representation of the very Throne of God'.[30] The multiple 'layeredness' or rich complexity of such symbolic interpretation of the church building, even at a comparatively early stage of Greek Christian reflection, is shown in Schloeder's summary of three chapters from the *Mystagogia* of the seventh century doctor St Maximus:

> The entire church is an image of the Universe, of the visible world, and of man; within it, the chancel represents man's soul, the altar his spirit, the *naos* his body. The bishop's Entrance into the church symbolizes Christ's coming into the flesh, his Entrance into the *bema* [the sanctuary] Christ's Ascension to heaven.[31]

Turning now to the West, such high mediaeval treatises as the canon regular Hugh of St Victor's *Speculum de mysteriis Ecclesiae*, the black monk Abbot Suger's *Libellus de consecratione Ecclesiae sancti Dionysii*, and bishop William Durandus's *Rationale divinorum officiorum* furnish an analogical treatment to that found further east. The themes of the Body of Christ and the Heavenly City bespeak divine order in its integrity and fullness, which buildings shaped for the celebration of the Liturgy should reflect.

As Schloeder points out, the most common schema in the Western Middle Ages is the cruciform church as representation of the Lord's own body on the Cross. In, for example, a mediaeval English cathedral with a black monk chapter:

> Christ's Head is at the apse which is the seat of governance represented by the bishop's cathedra; the choir is his throat from which the chants of the monks issue forth the praise of God; the transepts are his extended arms; his torso and legs form the nave since the gathered faithful are his body; the narthex represents his feet, where the faithful enter the church; and at the crossing is the altar, which is the heart of the church.[32]

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., p. 31: an encapsulation of *Mystagogia*, chapters 2, 4, and 8. See G. C. Berthold (tr.), *Maximus Confessor. Selected Writings* (London: SPCK, 1985), pp. 188–190 and 198. As Berthold explains in a note, 'the term mystagogy signifies a liturgical contemplation of the mystery of the Church' understood as 'new creation in Christ', ibid., p. 214. That is precisely why Maximus cannot avoid discussing the church building.

[32] Ibid., p. 32. Schloeder subsequently inserted this passage into a description of the ideal 'house of God' – implied, he holds, by a combination of the main ecclesiological concepts and images of *Lumen gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Thus *Architecture in Communion*, op. cit., p. 30.

That is not without a biblical basis. St Paul had called Christ the cornerstone (Ephesians 2: 20), and Christians members of his body (Romans 12: 5; I Corinthians 12: 12), so it was natural for Christians to see the church building as an expression of the body of the Lord. There was here a kind of Gospel transfiguration of the ancient conviction, classically expressed in Vitruvius's *De architectura*, that the wonderful proportions of the human body – confirming in the microcosm the macrocosmic harmony of nature – are architecture's proper measure. On such an understanding, nothing is more natural than to cover church walls with frescoes of the saints, or punctuate them with statues, since these remind the faithful how they are indeed part of Christ's 'mystical' body. A church is, in Schloeder's phrase, 'built theology'.[33]

Post-mediaeval churches continued to be designed to markedly symbolic plans. So Schloeder reminds us how Francesco Borromini, when remodelling the nave of St John Lateran, set up the twelve apostles in monumental statuary with the consecration crosses by their side, to bespeak the city of the Apocalypse which 'stood on twelve foundation stones, each one of which bore the name of the one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb' (Apocalypse 21: 4).[34] Although St Charles Borromeo's influential treatise *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae* which sought to summarise Catholic traditions of Church design shows a markedly practical bent, Borromeo began his work with the words:

> This only has been our principle: that we have shown that the norm and form of building, ornamentation and ecclesiastical furnishing are precise and in agreement with the thinking of the Fathers …[35]

That could not but ratify patristic (and post-patristic) theological symbolism – not least for Borromini.

The *Instructiones* were re-printed, largely unchanged, on at least nineteen occasions between 1577 and 1952.[36] They remain pertinent to post-Conciliar Catholicism, since, in a passage from the Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council highlighted by Schloeder, in any aspect of liturgical life:

> care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.[37]

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[33] Ibid., p. 12.

[34] Ibid., pp. 217–218.

[35] M. Marinelli (ed.), *Instructionum fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae libri II Caroli Borromei* (Vatican City: Libreris Editrice Vaticana, 2000), p. 4.

[36] M. E. Gallagos, 'Charles Borromeo and Catholic Tradition regarding the Design of Catholic Churches', *Sacred Architecture* 9 (2004), pp. 14–18.

[37] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 23.

That passage furnishes the *leit-motif* of his comprehensive 1998 study *Architecture in Communion*, just as it does for a more general study of liturgical principles which appeared a few years later, Alcuin Reid's *The Organic Development of the Liturgy*.[38]

Schloeder's exposition itself indicates that the tradition of symbolic interpretation was not uniform. It had variants, stemming from differences in both architectural style and theological background. Comper had increasingly sought to maximise the advantages of such pluralism by a policy of 'unity by inclusion': Gothic and Classical styles, for instance, are not, in Christian use, *opposites*.[39] Enough is in common to call this, in broad terms, *the* Tradition (of iconic interpretation of architecture, q.v.).

It is a tradition which requires reinstatement in our own time, above all through the construction of buildings that actually call for a reading along some such lines. Indeed, the post-Conciliar rite of *Dedication of a Church and Altar* demands it, explicitly calling the church building a representation of the heavenly Jerusalem.[40] If that rite bears any authority, then the shapes and volumes of sacred space need relating to ecclesial functions within an organic composition, and both massing and decoration allowed to recover their full symbolic valency. This in turn will permit the personal, devotional inhabiting of space as well as its corporate liturgical equivalent.

Architecture and Devotion

Mannion, writing in 1999, shortly after Schloeder, and on the eve both of *Built of Living Stones* and Meier's Jubilee church, was not especially sanguine as to prospects. In the secular realm, architectural Postmodernism and New Classicism were in full-scale reaction against the shortcomings of the twentieth century Modernist movement and, not least, its canonising of its own practices over against all earlier historical models. Among 'liturgical-architectural theorists', however, and by implication the practitioners who drew on their writings in constructing or 're-ordering' church buildings, there seemed no lessening in the 'hostility toward the past and the radical distance from traditional church styles

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[38] A. Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (Farnborough: St Michael's Press, 2004).

[39] A. Symondson, S. J., and S. Bucknall, *Sir Ninian Comper*, op. cit., pp. 105–112. Compare Quinlan Terry's remark that 'Gothic and Classical are not opposed to each other like modern and traditional construction … [I]n many ways [Gothic] is one of the many interesting digressions within the classical tradition': thus Q. Terry, 'The Survival of Classicism', *Sacred Architecture* 12 (2006), pp. 16–19, and here at p. 19. Terry, whose Catholic masterwork is the re-built cathedral at Brentwood, implies that the advent of Modernism shows up A. W. N. Pugin's mistake in taking for granted such contrariety.

[40] *Dedication of a Church and Altar*, I. 1.

sought by architects and designers after Vatican II'.[41] The minimalism and chilling frugality of iconography in most modern or recently re-ordered Western Catholic churches was impossible to square with the sort of historically accurate rules-of-thumb Comper had laid down. The largely aniconic interiors of Modernist Latin-rite churches were increasingly out of kilter with the major place still given to images in domestic Catholic life and devotion.[42] In his courageous editorial Mannion wrote:

> The functionalist principles of modern architecture and their inability to handle the ambiguity and polyvalence of Catholic devotionalism have conspired to render church architecture since Vatican II exceedingly anti-devotional. Many have lamented the removal from Catholic churches of popularly revered elements, as well as the disappearance of important conditions for the devotional life. The alienation from modern church architecture that exists on the part of many ordinary Catholic worshipers derives in great part from the rejection by the newer styles of traditional elements conducive to the devotional.[43]

That has reference to a wide variety of devotional objects, as well as to the overall 'atmosphere of a church' (Comper's phrase). The most important issues it raises are, however, those of altar and tabernacle, for which a comparatively full treatment seems, consequently, justified.

(i) The Altar

In particular, the chief devotional focus of the Church gathered for the Holy Sacrifice, its principal rite, is, as Comper so forcefully realised, the altar, which is the symbol of Christ and the place where his paschal sacrifice is renewed. The altar is also the place from which, in Holy Communion, the faithful are fed by the Bread of his body and the Wine of his precious blood. In a wider symbolic cosmology, the altar holds a central place as well. Their name coming from the word *altus*, a high place, the altar-steps bring to mind the ascent to the Temple of Jerusalem, the climb up the sacred mountain on which Zion was built. As the holy 'mountain', the altar remains the heart of the church. This makes treatment of the altar especially crucial.

First of all, there is the issue of *orientation*. In traditional usage, the altar is where possible placed at the east, on the solar axis. Facing the altar, one faces the rising

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41 M. F. Mannion, 'Beyond Environment and Art in Catholic Worship', art. cit., p. 3.

42 See, for an account of 'material culture' as it affects popular Catholicism, C. McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), and notably the chapter 'Christian Kitsch and the Rhetoric of Bad Taste' – though her (gender-based) account of 1960s iconoclasm seems over-simplifying.

43 M. F. Mannion, 'Beyond Environment and Art in Catholic Worship', art. cit., p. 4.

sun, which overcomes cosmic darkness as Christ's Resurrection and Ascension overcame spiritual. Orientation is a particularly neuralgic topic in contemporary Catholicism. The now widespread desire for a general return to *versus apsidem* celebration for the Liturgy of the Sacrifice (as distinct from that of the Word) constitutes an inescapable 'head-on' challenge to 'Modernism' – understanding by that term a stance that is at once architectural, liturgical, ecclesial, sacramental, and – by implication at least – eschatological.

'The custom of orientation is biblical and it expresses the eschaton.'[44] This simple statement sums it up. In a more complex presentation of the Judaic and early patristic materials, the Oratorian scholar Uwe Michael Lang has shown that *sacred direction* – specifically to the East – was the most important spatial consideration in early Christian prayer.[45] Its significance was primarily eschatological (the East was the direction of the Christ of the Parousia, see especially Matthew 24: 27 and 30) and, naturally, it applied to all the faithful, including their ministers. Archaeological evidence shows the great majority of ancient churches to have an oriented apse. Granted that the altar was the most honoured object in such buildings, the only safe inference is that the celebrant stood at the people's side, facing East, for the Anaphora. In the minority of buildings (notably at Rome and in North Africa) that have, by contrast, an oriented *entrance*, the position is less clear, but Lang argues persuasively that the celebrant in such a case prayed facing the doors (and thus the people) but did so with hands and eyes alike raised to the ceiling of the apse or arch where the decorative schemes of early Christian art are focussed. For Lang – who stresses that even when 'orientation' is not the geographical East but only a conventional 'liturgical East' – common direction is theologically important. Celebration *versus populum* in the modern (eyeball-to-eyeball) sense was unknown to Christian antiquity.[46] Not for them the situation where:

> The sight-lines stop at [the celebrant], centre on his person, competence, visage, voice, mannerisms, personality – uplifting or unbearable alike.[47]

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[44] H. Dietz, 'The Eschatological Dimension of Church Architecture. The Biblical Roots of Church Orientation', *Sacred Architecture* 10 (2005), pp. 12–14, and here at p. 12.

[45] U. M. Lang, of the Oratory, *Turning towards the Lord. Orientation in Liturgical Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004).

[46] I have made use here of some material from my review of Dr Lang's book in *New Blackfriars* 86. 1002 (2005), pp. 249–250. The 1964 instruction *Inter oecumenici* of the Congregation of Rites and the first edition (1970) of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* allow for the option of *versus populum* celebration. The question of how this became treated as a binding mandate remains to be answered. One proposal is, by an illicit inference from the first intentionally televised Mass from St Peter's (a basilica which, on account of the siting of the martyrium and therefore *per modum exceptionis*, had westward celebration). Thus S. J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion*, op. cit., p. 69.

[47] R. Low, 'Go East, Young Man', art. cit., p. 18.

At its most objectionable, such a practice 'elevates the priest above the Sacrament, the servant above the Master, the man above the Messiah'.[48] The late Louis Bouyer remarked with disarming frankness:

> Either you look at somebody doing something for you, instead of you, or you do it with him. You can't do both at the same time.[49]

The historian of the Western Liturgy Klaus Gamber put it more theologically:

> The person who is doing the offering is facing the one who is receiving the offering; thus he stands *before* the altar, positioned *ad Dominum*, facing the Lord.[50]

From the English experience Lang makes the powerful point that the adoption of the eastward position by the Oxford Movement clergy was key to their efforts to give a Catholic character to the Church of England, precisely because that position was taken (by opponents as well as allies) to express the sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic rite as a Godward act.[51]

To the issue of the oriented altar may be added the issue of *veiling* which covers such topics as not only veils of fabric, as in the side-curtains of the 'English' or 'Sarum' altar revived by Anglo-Catholics like Comper in the early twentieth century,[52] but also, in paint, wood, and stone, the iconostasis of the East and the rood screen and *cancelli* or communion rails of the West. The Writer to the Hebrews addresses his readers:

> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain [veil], that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart. (10: 19–22)

The American Dominican Michael Carey, recalling how *cancelli* or 'rails' where the faithful receive the Lord's body and blood have historically given this access to the sanctuary architectural expression, comments:

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[48] Ibid.

[49] L. Bouyer, *Liturgy and Architecture* (ET South Bend, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 59.

[50] K. Gamber, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Background* (ET San Juan Capistrano, CA: Una Voce, 1993), p. 178.

[51] Cf. A. Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1965), pp. 309–312.

[52] Actually, it was as much French as English. Comper had discovered it in miniatures in French and English Books of Hours. See D. Stancliffe, 'The English Altar [1]', *Art and Christianity* 41 (2005), pp. 1–7, and here at p. 4.

> If the sanctuary [of the church building] is that sacred place which holds in a special way the Real Presence of the Lord on the altar and in the tabernacle; and if the veil or veiling structure around the sanctuary represents the humanity of Christ, as the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches; and, further, if we can only enter into God's Presence *through* the humanity of Christ: then, that veiling structure is necessary … Some veiling structure, then, continues to be of utmost importance for a proper liturgical spirituality. Its removal would symbolically eliminate the necessity of Christ's Humanity, as if we could enter into the presence of the Divinity without it.[53]

For Carey this is crucial to, in the title of Comper's essay, 'the atmosphere of a church'. The sense of, in Romano Guardini's words, 'the altar as threshold', sets up an isomorphism between the movement of the Incarnation and the spatial inter-relation of sanctuary and nave. In both cases God stoops down to encounter us, from there to assist us, not without difficulty, across the barrier into his own realm of burning holiness and light. Here, as with the Byzantine icon-screen, threshold is not only borderline. It is also crossing over.

In that Byzantine tradition, indeed, the earlier low railed screen of the *cancelli* into which occasional images might be fixed, had developed by the sixteenth century into the full, floor to ceiling, wall-like iconostasis of first Russian and subsequently Greek and other churches. The role of the iconostasis is subtle, as the early twentieth century Russian Orthodox philosopher Pavel Florensky explains.

> [T]he iconostasis is a boundary between the visible and invisible worlds, and it functions as a boundary by being an obstacle to our seeing the altar, thereby making it accessible to our consciousness by means of its unified row of saints (i.e. by its cloud of witnesses) that surround the altar where God is, the sphere where heavenly glory dwells, thus proclaiming the Mystery. Iconostasis is vision.[54]

In other words, veiling at one level permits unveiling at another. The iconostasis does not only carry images of the saints but evokes the inter-related mysteries of Incarnation and Atonement. As a sympathetic English interpreter explains:

> In front of the altar, the Royal Gates with Gabriel's message and the Virgin's answer open the way to God's historical gift of Himself, still present with us. And on the two sides of the gates the double significance of Bethlehem and Olivet is revealed: on the north, the Virgin and the Child; on the south, Christ Pantokrator – the All-Emperor: the kenosis is answered by the Kingdom. Behind

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[53] M. R. Carey, O. P., 'Veiling the Mysteries', *Sacred Architecture* 3 (2000), pp. 23–27, and here at p. 24.

[54] P. Florensky, *Iconostasis* (ET Crestwood, N. Y., St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), p. 62.

> the veil, the altar speaks of Calvary, but Easter at once is all around us. The altar is also the life-bringing Tomb, the Fountain of the Resurrection.[55]

The Western rood screen performs the same function of theologically significant veiling, with its painted or carved saints running along the line demarcating nave and sanctuary, surmounted by the Cross of the Lord. It does not represent an obscuring of the altar but its visibility through a 'window' framed by the saints and other motifs of Catholic doctrine. It is strange that, although the 1970 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* deemed that the sanctuary should be 'marked off from the nave either by a higher floor level or by a distinctive structure and décor',[56] its promulgation was followed by a rash of 'removalitis': the demolition of screens and even communion rails in many – if not most – Latin-rite church-buildings. For Durandus, the rail between altar and choir had taught specifically 'the separation of things celestial from things terrestrial'.[57] Awaiting communion kneeling at the rail encourages a moment of concentrated recollection before the altar which is less easy to reproduce when standing behind other communicants in a line.

Can one regard the addition of a ciborium (civory) or tester (painted canopy) as veiling? Though altars with civories – a columned structure above the altar made in stone, wood, or metal – often had curtains enabling the altar itself to be veiled between the beginning of the Preface and the end of the priest's communion (missals from the first half of the sixteenth century still refer to this),[58] the civory's function was, rather, to honour the altar. They were favoured features of Comper's buildings. The Anglican liturgist Bishop David Stancliffe writes:

> To give [the altar] emphasis, and to combine physical proximity with a sense of transcendence, a ciborium adds dignity and colour. It also gives it a defined place within the undefined space of the church. Comper is familiar with the early Roman basilicas, and uses their syntax, if not their vocabulary.[59]

The 'tester' is an alternative way of making the same gracious point. A feature of Comper's earlier work, and presuming the 'English' altar, this canopy, suspended from the ceiling, was a lighter structure than the civory. Characteristically, Comper decorated the tester with a painted Christ in majesty comparable – he hoped – to the great mediaeval Sicilian mosaic majesties of Cefalù and Monreale. From the

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55 D. J. Chitty, 'The Communion of Saints', in E. L. Mascall (ed.), *The Church of God. An Anglo-Russian Symposium by Members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius* (London: SPCK, 1934), pp. 155–172, and here at p. 163.

56 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 258.

57 Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, I. 1. 31.

58 A. A. King, *The Liturgy of the Roman Church* (London: Longmans, 1957), p. 87.

59 D. Stancliffe, 'The English Altar [1]', art. cit., p. 4.

civory or tester would hang (if Comper could persuade the patrons) the reserved Sacrament in a pyx, of which Stancliffe remarks:

> Where this has been done, there is a remarkable sense of the presence of Christ filling the building – something the more locked-away methods of reservation fail to communicate.[60]

(ii) The Tabernacle

The question of the *Eucharistic tabernacle* (the normal Roman Rite equivalent to Comper's hanging pyx), and its adornment and placing, is inescapable here. The history of tabernacle design is more interesting than cupboards like the box at the Roman Jubilee church might lead once to suspect. In early modern Catholicism, Eucharistic tabernacles were most frequently constructed on the model of the Ark of the Covenant in the Solomonic Temple: that is why they were veiled with a fabric covering usually changed according to the liturgical colour of the season or day. Fairly commonly, adoring angels appear in the iconography on tabernacle doors or adjacent areas, again evoking the Israelite Ark which had its own figures of attendant cherubim (Exodus 25: 18–22). In earlier epochs, animals, fruits, or flowers could be incorporated into tabernacle design, to signify how the entire world is *en route* to transfiguration via the Eucharistic Lord. Tabernacles have also been designed as churches in miniature, since the Eucharistic sacrament which they house 'unifies the person of Christ and his living body, the Church'.[61] Again, the tabernacle has taken the form of a treasure-chest, because the entire spiritual treasury of salvation is present in Christ, or, in another format, of a tower reaching up toward heaven: an obvious symbolism for the earthly tabernacle *qua* prefiguring the heavenly. So much iconological effort implies the existence of a powerful theological rationale.

> The sense of distance that Catholics have traditionally kept from the Eucharistic tabernacle, often venerating it from afar, is not so much a pagan devotional remnant, but rather a statement that the earthly worshippers remain at some distance from the heavenly tabernacle. The Eucharist will only be received in all its fullness in the eternal banquet of heaven, while on earth the fullness of Eucharistic reality remains literally and spiritually 'reserved' for the future.[62]

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[60] Ibid. Quarr Abbey is a rare (possibly unique) example of this in a Catholic church in England.

[61] M. F. Mannion, 'Eucharistic Tabernacles: a Typology', *Sacred Architecture* 3 (2000), pp. 10–13, and here at p. 11.

[62] Ibid., p. 12. A more classical theological statement of the same point would refer to the 'fullness of that reality the Eucharist signifies' being so 'reserved'.

Whatever sculptural form the tabernacle takes, both popular feeling and the general *Tendenz* of Roman documents since the immediate aftermath of the post-Conciliar reform militate against the marginalisation it has suffered in many new or re-ordered churches. The 1967 Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* of the Congregation of Rites appeared to lack a proper theology of the distinct but inter-related modes of relation to the Paschal Mystery of Christ enjoyed by the tabernacle on the one hand, the consecrated Elements on the altar on the other.[63] Yielding to a pervasive contemporary temptation, it foreshortened the eschatological orientation which was itself the main theological advance, *vis-à-vis* earlier magisterial statements on the Liturgy, of Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.[64] Once again, it is an American voice that sounds the alert.

> As permanent signs of Christ and His Pasch, the reserved Eucharist and the Church do not conflict with the unfolding of the paschal sacrifice in the liturgy when they are present prior to the consecration, rather they are signs formed in previous liturgies which draw us back to the eternal Pasch present anew in the contemporary celebrations … Because the consecration, the Host on the altar, the assembled Church, and the tabernacle have distinct relations to the Pasch, they do not detract from each other when simultaneously present.[65]

By 1980, when John Paul II's Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship issued its Instruction *Inaestimabile donum*, it seemed plain that 'problems had arisen with a diminution of devotion to the Eucharist, not disassociated from inadequate attention to the place of reservation in new or renovated churches'.[66] Hence the Instruction's insistence that the tabernacle be located in 'a distinguished place …, conspicuous, suitably adorned and conducive to prayer'.[67] The same note is struck in Benedict XVI's Post-Synodal Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*.[68] Without a prominent tabernacle (or hanging pyx – why not?) there is no possibility – special supernatural graces aside – of what Stancliffe terms a sense of the presence of Christ *filling* a building. In *The Spirit of the Liturgy* Joseph Ratzinger maintained:

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[63] See T. V. Vaverek, 'The Place of the Eucharistic Tabernacle: A Question of Discrepancy', *Antiphon* 4: 2; idem., '*Eucharisticum Mysterium* 55 and the Four Modes of Presence: Inadequate Principles of Church Design', *Sacred Architecture* 4 (2000), pp. 22–26, and note 53 above.

[64] Idem., 'The Controversy over Symbols: Roots of the Conflict in the Misuse of *Eucharisticum Mysterium* 55', *Antiphon* 7: 2 (2000), pp. 10–20.

[65] Ibid., p. 17.

[66] P. J. Elliott, *The Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite. The Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), p. 324.

[67] *Inaestimabile donum*, 24.

[68] *Sacramentum caritatis,* 69.

> The Eucharistic Presence in the tabernacle does not set another view of the Eucharist alongside or against the Eucharistic celebration, but simply signifies its complete fulfilment. For this Presence has the effect, of course, of keeping the Eucharist forever in church. The church never becomes a lifeless space but is always filled with the presence of the Lord, which comes out of the celebration, leads us into it, and always makes us participants in the cosmic Eucharist. [And he asks rhetorically,] 'What man of faith has not experienced this?'[69]

Conclusion

Francis Mannion relaxed his characteristic iron discipline of under-statement when he wrote:

> [A] future generation of historians will make a stronger connection than we do today between the early iconoclastic movement, the Reformation 'stripping of altars', and the post-Vatican II treatment of the historic heritage of Catholic art.[70]

Three years previously, in the unlikely context of the London *Tablet*, the stained glass artist Patrick Reyntiens had entered a similar plea.

> [I]t begins to become more and more obvious that the exact ambience and cultural context of the visible elements in the interiors of modern churches should be thought out and acted upon in far greater seriousness and depth than hitherto … [T]he sacred space has been violated since Vatican II very much as it was first at the time of the Reformation, and this must be rectified for the health of the Church.[71]

And so, *Quo vadis*? As if with prophetic insight into the ravages of architectural Modernism, the American Neo-Gothic builder Ralph Adams Cram wrote in the opening year of the twentieth century:

> We must return for the fire of life to other centuries, since a night intervened between our fathers' time and ours wherein the light was not.[72]

That was Comper's message too, but in his case it came to entail a comprehensive openness to all the great stylistic epochs of the Church as builder. That was

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69 J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (ET San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), p. 90.

70 M. F. Mannion, 'Beyond Environment and Art in Catholic Worship', art. cit., p. 7.

71 P. Reyntiens, 'All Distraction and Half-truths', *The Tablet*, 1 June 1996, p. 731.

72 Cited from R. Adams Cram, *Church Building: A Study of the Principles of Architecture in relation to the Church* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, and Co., 1901), in M. S. Rose, *In Tiers of Glory*, op. cit., p. 91.

possible owing to both the ontological character of beauty as a transcendental determination of being and the fundamental internal coherence or organicity of the Church's tradition. The unifying element in any particular building comes from the architect's contribution. A church must be not only a rationally designed liturgical space but a unified work of art.

John Henry Newman, in the nineteenth of the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (volume six), took as his text Psalm 78: 69, which in the Authorised Version reads, 'He built His sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which He hath established for ever'. Newman used the homiletic opportunity to argue against the opinion that Jesus's prediction to the Woman of Samaria – future worshippers 'shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth' (John 4: 23) – nullifies the psalm in question (and in so doing renders trivial the topic of this essay).

> Our Saviour did *not* say to the Samaritan woman that there should be no places and buildings for worship under the Gospel, *because* He has *not* brought it to pass, *because* such ever have been, at all times and in all countries, and amid all differences of faith. And the same reasons which lead us to believe that religious edifices are a Christian ordinance, though so very little is said about them in Scripture, will also show that it is right and pious to make them enduring, and stately, and magnificent, and ornamental; so that our Saviour's declaration, when He foretold the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, was not that there should never be any other house built to His honour, but rather that there should be many houses; that they should be built, not merely at Jerusalem, or at Gerizim, but every where; what was under the Law a local ordinance, being henceforth a Catholic privilege, allowed not here and there, but wherever was the Spirit and the Truth. The glory of the Gospel is not the *abolition* of rites, but their *dissemination*; not their absence, but their living and efficacious presence through the grace of Christ.[73]

A church-building, says Newman, represents

> the beauty, the loftiness, the calmness, the mystery, and the sanctity of religion … and that in many ways; still, I will say, more than all these, it represents to us its eternity. It is the witness of Him who is the first and the last; it is the token and emblem of 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever' …[74]

That is why they are:

> happy … who, when they enter within their holy limits, enter in heart into the court of heaven. And most unhappy, who, while they have eyes to admire,

[73] J. H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* Volume VI (London: Rivingtons, 1881), p. 271.

[74] Ibid., p. 273.

> admire them only for their beauty's sake, and the skill they exhibit; who regard them as works of art, not fruits of grace; bow down before their material forms, instead of worshipping 'in spirit and in truth'; count their stones, and measure their spaces, but discern in them no tokens of the invisible, no canons of truth, no lessons of wisdom, to guide them forward in the way heavenward![75]

We enter these iconic buildings aright if, as we do so, we contemplate the mystery of the Church and, through the Church, the Kingdom. Go to the greatest of Comper's churches – to St Mary's Wellingborough (Northamptonshire), or St Cyprian's, Clarence Gate (London) – and you will learn how.[76]

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[75] Ibid., p. 279.

[76] One Comper church, All Saints, London Colney (Hertfordshire), came by purchase into Catholic hands in 1974. If not by then at any rate soon after Catholics had unfortunately forgotten how to use such a church. On my own visit, I found that, despite Comper's provision of a high altar enjoying total visibility from all parts of the building, a table had been erected for Mass at its west end, thus ensuring that the worshippers (except for the celebrant) turned their backs throughout the Liturgy on sanctuary, altar, civory, and the great east window with its typical Comper *Majestas* of the eternally youthful Christ.

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Chapter 5
The Icon Revisited

Introduction

An ecclesial architecture calls for its complement in image. Iconophobia does not fit the religion of the Incarnation. Iconodule reaction is a sign of health in the Church organism. The Iconoclast crisis of the eighth and ninth centuries in Byzantium was especially traumatic, but it also summoned up antibodies on a generous scale. Iconophile defence has left permanent a mark which continues to distinguish the Slav-Byzantine world from other forms of Eastern Christianity such as those found in, say, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Armenia, as well as from Latin Christianity. The two most obvious traces are, first, the sheer prominence given to the cult of images, both publicly and privately, and, secondly, the emergence of a canonical scheme of images, a fixed programme of images, for church decoration, with some consequences, as we shall see, for private veneration of icons likewise.[1]

The most obvious example of both prominence and programme is pre-Revolutionary Russia. It should not be a matter of surprise that the modern theology of the icon arose there in the late nineteenth century. An atheist State supervening, the chief theologians of the icon, as the twentieth century progressed, would be members of the Russian Orthodox diaspora who fled to the West during or after the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917.

How, then, did Russians 'revisit' the Byzantine icon?

On the Eve of the Revolution

With the help of a recent historian of Russian Orthodoxy, I begin with a glimpse of the situation in the Tsardom's last generation. Late imperial Russia testifies to the huge role played by the icon in traditional culture at its ending (I use the term 'icon' in its narrower sense of a painting on a portable wooden panel, not its wider, and equally valid, denotation, which can cover fresco or mosaic, sometimes on a monumental scale).[2] In her account of Russian Orthodoxy on the

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[1] For an overview of the development of Christian iconography up to and including the Iconoclast crisis, see A. Nichols, O. P., 'The Origin and Crisis of Christian Art', in idem., *Redeeming Beauty. Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 21–49.

[2] For the modern confining of the term 'icon' to such panel paintings, see R. Cormack, 'The Icon, Past, Present, and Future', in R. Grierson, *Gates of Mystery. The Art of Holy*

eve of the Revolution, Vera Shevzov furnishes a graphic account of the place of the icon, notably in the many outdoor processions which punctuated church life in both town and countryside (but especially the latter).[3] Though the technical term for such a procession was 'procession with a cross' (*krestnyi khod*), these perambulations, reports Shevzov, were commonly known as the 'raising of icons' (*podniatie ikon*). She describes the practices (which throw light on the curious use of the word 'raising') as well as the popular theology involved.

> Once a procession was underway, believers either followed behind or ran ahead. The believers who ran ahead then waited for the procession to approach them, and they would prostrate themselves on the ground so that the procession would be forced to move around them. Those carrying the icons would lift them over these believers' heads. According to certain believers, God would send his grace upon them when the icon was passing over their heads.[4]

Orthodox Churchmen sometimes described processions as 'moving temples', or 'temples outside the temple'. The cross and gospel book reminded the faithful of the church's altar, the icons of its icon screen, and so on. 'In this way, the sacred space of the temple building was seen as expanding out into nature, thereby sanctifying all of creation.'[5] The ground the procession covered was held to be blessed by the steps of Christ, Mary, and the saints, who were said to participate in the procession via their iconographic representations.

Most churchmen of the immediately pre-Revolutionary period, so Shevzov finds, stressed the role of the carrying of the cross. It was through the cross's power, as the sign of victory over evil and death, that air and water, streets and paths through the fields could be sanctified. But, as in the Byzantine Iconophiles' incorporation of the cult of the cross of their Iconoclast opponents,[6] there was no call to set the veneration of the cross *over against* the role of the icons.[7] Associating the procession with Jesus's own 'procession' to Golgotha, one author

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Russia (Fort Worth, TX: InterCultura, 1993), pp. 321–329, and here at p. 321.

[3] V. Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[4] Ibid., p. 147.

[5] Ibid., p. 148.

[6] On the cult of the cross in early Iconoclast poetry, see S. Gerö, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, Subsidia 41 (Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 1973), pp. 113–126.

[7] For the argument of the Iconophile doctor Nicephorus of Constantinople that, since Christ's body is what gives value to the form of the cross, refusal of veneration of the body (depicted in the icons) renders meaningless the veneration of the cross, see C. Barker, *Figure and Likeness. On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 98.

> recalled Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross, followed by the apostles, Mary, and the myrrh-bearing women. So too, he continued, the contemporary procession paralleled this event, with the carrying of the cross followed by the banners and icons that represented Jesus's followers.[8]

Not surprisingly, perhaps, visionary or dream experience of figures from Christian revelation was often not so much of the figures in themselves as of the figures *in their icons*.

As Shevzov points out, for many of the faithful much of the significance of the icon turned on its 'life' or 'narrative': that is, its own origins, the events with which it had been involved, the experiences believers had enjoyed – or endured – in its company. Such narratives, involving supernatural, and sometimes miraculous, elements, had certainly played a part in legitimising the veneration of icons at the 'icon Council', the Second Council of Nicaea (787), though they do not figure in its *horos* (dogmatic definition),[9] nor do they bulk large in the subsequent doctrinal theology of the image in the Byzantine church. As well as the 'common' icons generally venerated, various sorts of 'uncommon' icon – which might be described as 'wonder-working', 'locally revered', or 'specially revered' – were recognised by Russia's Church hierarchy (though without necessarily achieving much clarity in the way of distinguishing these categorical differentiations).[10]

Some icons in the last years of the Tsardom were held to be 'epiphanic' – that is, they had seemingly materialised from nowhere, being found in odd places like the forks of trees, or by water brooks. Evidently, these are comparable to what the patristic Church recognised as *acheiropoieta* icons – icons 'not made by hands' – such as the much discussed *Mandylion* of Edessa, or, to take a less complex example (for the *Mandylion* legend speaks initially of the Saviour permitting a portrait to be painted of him in his lifetime), the Cappadocian image known from the village of its discovery as the *Kamouliana*. On 16 August, the Russian church celebrated a feast of the Image of the Lord Jesus Christ Not Made by Hands, seen as the foundation of all icon painting. As worshippers greeted the Christ icon in church, the festal *kontakion* for the day rang out: 'We praise thee, Lover of humankind, beholding thy image and seeing thy gaze: give, O Saviour, to thy slaves, through this, unhindered entry to Eden'.[11]

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[8] V. Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, op. cit., p. 148.

[9] For which, see A. Nichols, O. P., 'The Horos of Nicaea II. A Theological Evaluation', *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum* 20 (1988), pp. 171–181; more widely, A. Giakalis, *Images of the Divine. The Theology of the Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

[10] V. Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, op. cit., p. 173.

[11] For a discussion of the 'Holy Face' images, see H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (ET Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 208–224. On the *Mandylion* in particular, see A. Cameron, 'The

Another category of icon described by Shevzov is that of 'self-renewing' images: icons that appeared newly cleaned of their darkened varnish, or with their paint colours repaired or refreshed, but without obvious human mediation. There were also icons whose votive lamps and candles had a disconcerting habit of rekindling themselves. Finally, of course, there were icons which had played a role in unexplained healings or other fortuitous blessings.

The icon's life-story was intertwined with individual or popular memories of this kind, while, thanks to the invention of printing and the railroads, cheap reproductions of such 'uncommon' icons could achieve a remarkable diffusion through this, the largest and most populous by far of the Christian States of Europe. But the development of the mechanically reproduced icon, a predictable consequence of industrialisation, aroused qualms. The religious philosopher Pavel Florensky (on whom more anon) was at pains to justify copied icons, whose spiritual content, he thought, was identical with that of their 'prototype'. By 'prototype' Florensky meant not the holy subject the icon portrayed, which would be the referent of the term as used by Byzantine theologians. He meant, rather, the original painting.[12] But Florensky drew the line at 'mere servile mechanical reproduction'.[13] (His distaste was widely shared not least by icon-painters whose livelihoods were put at risk.)

Beyond the capacity, it seems, of the organs of the Holy Synod to control in an otherwise highly bureaucratic system of Church government, was the popular desire to have especially revered icons brought for veneration from the monasteries, cathedrals, or parish churches where they were normally kept. Shevzov calls such icon-visitations 'pilgrimages in reverse'.[14] She explains the extraordinary popularity of these events.

> When a group of believers rallied in reverence around an icon, they embraced the experiences the icon represented. By inviting the icon, they were establishing their own involvement in the icon's history. It was fitting liturgically to celebrate this perceived shared history through the greeting of the icon and through special prayer services in the homes of town or village residents. Some communities also symbolically expressed this relationship to a particularly revered icon by having an icon from their own village or parish temporarily join the procession.[15]

In a miniature way, such 'meetings' of icons may be compared to the great Roman procession (the date of its origin is uncertain, but could be eighth century) in which

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History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story', in *Okeanos. Essays presented to I. Ševčenko* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 80–94.

12 P. Florensky, *Iconostasis* (ET Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), p. 74.

13 Ibid., p. 75.

14 V. Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, op. cit., p. 187.

15 Ibid., p. 189.

the icon of the Saviour from the sacristy of the cathedral of St John Lateran was brought on the feast of the Dormition to 'visit' the icon of Mary kept at the basilica of St Mary Major under the title *Salus populi romani*.[16]

At the close of the Tsarist period, 'processions in reverse' could also be personalised by arranging for the visiting icon to stop off in individual homes. Orthodox spokesmen reflected that healings and other miracles seemed now to be chiefly carried out through the medium of icons (and relics). They compared the icons in this regard to the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant: a material artefact that was also a mediation of divine agency. But they were careful to add that it is the prayer of faith which 'attracts' wonder-working power.[17] By law, claims to special status for icons involved in exceptional events had always to be investigated by panels of theologically qualified persons (which included doctors or other scientists for alleged miracles). The State laid down penalties for fraudulent or premature recognition.

The requirement that icons undergoing assessment should not be on public view frequently caused tensions between village and diocesan or national Church organs, as Shevzov shows in her study, whose chief focus is the variable, not to say conflicting, opinions about the ordering of Church life on the part of Orthodox spokesmen in the last decades of the Tsardom's existence (and just beyond).

The Deeper Roots

All this had deep historical roots in the *longue durée* of pre-Revolutionary Russia, as the cultural historian Oleg Tarasov's study of the early modern period, *Icon and Devotion*, readily attests.[18] Tarasov treats the icons – and he is speaking principally of popular icon-art, not the great showpieces of mediaeval Russian iconography[19] – as hardly less than the Orthodox Russian world-outlook's 'motive force'.[20] He brings together an astonishingly rich variety of evidence to construct that unusual case.

Tarasov considers that the early sixteenth century monastic movement associated with Joseph of Volokolamsk strongly influenced Russian Orthodoxy in the direction of an 'excessively developed ritualism and orientation towards

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16 H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, op. cit., pp. 63–73.

17 V. Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, op. cit., p. 192.

18 O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion. Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia* (ET London: Reaktion Books, 2002).

19 On which see, wonderfully illustrated, V. Lazarev, *The Russian Icon from its Origins to the Sixteenth Century* (ET Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997).

20 The phrase comes from the book's English editor, Robin Milner-Gulland, in 'Editor's Foreword', O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., pp. 9–21, and here at p. 9, but the main text shows that it is merited.

an external cult aesthetic'.[21] Joseph's programme for the monastic life certainly emphasised the spiritual fruits of acquired habits in external matters.[22] He also encouraged the lavish endowment of his monasteries with gifts, not least for the sumptuous celebration of the Liturgy (though land was a better long-term investment).[23] There is, then, some basis here for Tarasov's view (inherited from the historical theologian George Florovsky) that 'Josephism' heightened expectations of icon-veneration as well as encouraging the sheer accumulation of icon panels on a scale that amazed not only Protestant and Catholic visitors but foreign Orthodox too. By emphasising the splendour of ritual celebration in a communal context, the Volokolamsk school of Muscovite monasticism accorded special value to the beauty – the physical appearance – of icons. Does this stand in tension, as Tarasov seems to think, with the primary stress on dogmatic or hagiographic content in the medieval period?[24] Whatever answer be given to this question, and it may be that the historian's concept of beauty is insufficiently examined,[25] the icon was not yet in danger of losing its sacral – and sacralising – power. On the contrary, writes Tarasov:

> The vast quantity of icons in Russia that revealed signs of the heavenly world in the earthly aimed not only to 'reflect' sacred history but actively to influence the collective consciousness: over the centuries there arose a conviction of the ubiquity of the image of Christ on Russian soil, that is to say in the idea that Russia was under divine protection, was a land 'chosen by God'. The history of Russian icon production turned out to be closely linked with the development of the theory of 'Moscow the Third Rome' and with the formation in the unconscious historical experience of an artificially constructed and speculative model of 'Holy Russia'.[26]

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[21] Ibid., p. 29.

[22] T. Špidlik, 'Joseph de Volokolamsk. Un chapitre de la spiritualité russe', *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* CXLVI (1956), pp. 89–126.

[23] The resultant controversy with the 'non-possessor' monks influenced by the spirituality of apostolic poverty of St Nil Sorsky is examined in J. Meyendorff, 'Partisans et ennemis des biens ecclésiastiques au sein du monachisme russe aux XVe et XVIe siècles', *Irénikon* XXIX (1956), pp. 28–46, 151–164.

[24] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 29. True, he is citing Leonid Ouspensky (whose iconology is discussed below), but favourably so.

[25] For a very different view, which denies the hold of any merely aestheticist appreciation of the beautiful in the Russian tradition, see V. Weidlé, *Russia: Absent and Present* (ET London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), p. 143.

[26] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 30.

This explains the sub-title chosen (by author and editor) for the English version of the book. The Russia of the Imperial period was itself a sacred space, a 'Great Icon', a trope which recurs as this study proceeds.[27]

The sheer number of churches, monasteries, and chapels added to this sense of Russia as sacrally saturated – even if, after the suppression of the patriarchate, the amount of money spent thereon – and the limitations on the availability of labour caused by the high number of feast-days – worried the State authority.

The Icon in Home, Church, Street

As already mentioned, travelogues produced by Western visitors to Russia from the sixteenth century onwards often note the prominence of the cult of images, and this is so whether the visitors in question were Lutherans, Catholics, or Orthodox from other parts of the Orthodox world. An Orthodox archdeacon, travelling from Aleppo in the entourage of a patriarch of Antioch, was as much surprised by it as was a Danish ambassador. Muscovy, or, as it came to be called from the time of Peter the Great onwards, 'Russia', was pullulating with icons. In the mid seventeenth century Paul of Aleppo noted:

> In each house there is a countless multitude of icons, adorned with gold, silver and precious stones, and not only within houses, but also at all doors, even at house-gates, and this is true not only of Boyars [members of the merchant class], but of peasants in the villages, since their love and faith towards the icons is very great.[28]

The densest concentration of icons would be in domestic interiors. Thanks to its small scale, the icon could reach places others could not. Typically, peasant houses in seventeenth century Muscovy had an icon corner known as the 'high Jerusalem', and in larger dwellings these would become a fully fledged oratory with an iconostasis in several tiers modelled on the developed icon screen of a church-building. Roughly around 1400, the Byzantine open work altar rail, carrying a few select images, had been transformed in Russia into a closed wall of icons, and this is what was imitated on a miniature scale in the houses of the rich.[29] In effect, it was a kind of tapestry quilt of images placed on a convenient wall.

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[27] Ibid., pp. 28, 38, 44, 45, 57, 117.

[28] Cited ibid., p. 38. Paul's 'Testimonies concerning the Patriarch Nicon, the tsar, and the Boyars: from the travels of the Patriarch Macarius of Antioch' was translated into English by a Tractarian divine interested in the Russian church: see W. Palmer, *The Patriarch and the Tsar*, 2 (London: Trübner and Co., 1873).

[29] C. Walter, 'The Origins of the Iconostasis', *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1971), pp. 251–267; A.W. Epstein, 'The Middle Byzantine Sanctuary Barrier', *Journal of the British Archeological Association* 134 (1981), pp. 1–28; M. Cheremeteff, 'The Transformation of

A seventeenth century Habsburg ambassador recorded how visitors always looked first for the icons and greeted them, crossing themselves and reciting the 'Lord have mercy'.[30] Only then did they turn and acknowledge their hosts. A nineteenth century Dutch Calvinist artist and ethnographer encountered the same behaviour, and expressed amazement at the custom of turning first to an icon and only then to a person.[31]

Acquiring such icons followed definite conventions. People never spoke of 'buying' icons: the word expected was 'exchanged'. That might simply be euphemism, but often enough there was a transaction which corresponded literally to this usage, at least in part: a badly worn icon was left at an icon stall alongside what was termed 'exchange money'.[32] In the mid eighteenth century, at which time the Church was governed not by the patriarch but by a synod with a lay civil-servant presiding, laws were enacted giving priests the responsibility for making sure that domestic icons were properly cared for, by appropriate dusting and washing. (In the nineteenth century, this legislation was extended to the care of icons placed on wayside posts and in the branches of trees.)[33]

Once acquired, how did people arrange their icons in 'high Jerusalems'? Often enough, centrally placed would be the *Deêsis* or 'Intercession', consisting of Christ flanked by his Mother on one side, and his prophetic forerunner, John the Baptist, on the other. From and around this, a personal version of the official icon programme could then be built up – 'personal' since highlighting local saints or saints especially important to the household (patrons corresponding to its members' baptismal names are an obvious example). Sometimes there were exact replicas of the official iconostasis in the shape of folding panels: a nineteenth century example now in the State Museum of the History of Religion at St Petersburg has as many as 15 scenes to display.[34]

Tarasov compares such domestic iconostases to the devotional images of the late mediaeval and later West: what Germans call *Andachtsbilder*, images small enough for personal contemplation and intended to stimulate devotion in the home. The comparison is, however, relevant only in part. These products of the Northern Gothic were typically restricted to a small choice of themes: notably the Man of Sorrows, Christ with the instruments of the Passion, the Pietà, the Virgin of Sorrows, the Vernicle (Veronica's Veil), all of which were connected, in one way or another, with the Passion of Christ. Widening the use of the term '*Andachtsbild*'

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the Russian Sanctuary Barrier and the Role of Theophanes the Greek', in A. Leong (ed.), *The Millenium: Christianity and Russia* (New York, 1990), pp. 107–140; and, with a wider purview, N. Labrecque-Pervouchine, *L'Iconostase: une évolution historique en Russie* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1982).

30 O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 66.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., pp. 66–67.

33 Ibid., p. 67.

34 Illustrated in ibid., p. 41.

generally leads, as one historian has complained, to the evaporation of any specific meaning it might carry.[35] The images that make up miniaturised iconostases in the Russian context, albeit 'personalised' (in varying degrees), tend to enjoy a far fuller correspondence with the official Liturgy of the Church than do those in the West with their theologically restricted range of subjects. Standing before them, suitably disposed, Orthodox Russians considered themselves to be in the world of God, with the saints and angels. From an inventory of the Kremlin palace in the reign of Nicholas II and Alexandra we know there were at least forty icons in the tsar's bedroom, and a reconstruction of the tsarina's bedroom at the summer palace of the imperial family at Tsarskoye Selo (outside St Petersburg) meets the expectation thus aroused. In this late example, Alexandra's room, of which a photograph is reproduced in Tarasov's study, has surrendered the unified dogmatic scheme of the official iconostasis in favour of what he terms 'a programme of personal devotion, based on the idea of intercession and on … the mystical juxtaposition of Heaven and earth'.[36]

In homes where economics allowed, but more frequently in churches, the practice from the mid sixteenth century on was to cover the more important icons with gold or silver, or at any rate glittering casing. The reply of metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov) of Moscow in the mid 1850s to a clerical request from a Moscow parish to be allowed to have some icons silver-clad indicates a belief in a real presence of the holy figure in the icon, a concept to which the theology of the Iconophile doctors of the Byzantine church at best only gestured.[37] In granting the request, the archbishop asked the priest concerned to make known to the benefactors the words of Christ in St Matthew's gospel, 'I was naked and you clothed me'.[38]

The icon, so regarded, was understandably central to the experience of church-going. Paul of Aleppo observed how on entering a church Russians prayed at length before the icons:

> since among them one cannot pray otherwise than in front of an icon, fixing one's gaze on it: that is to say they really do prostrate themselves before it, and do not pray just anyhow, as we do.[39]

Paul reports that in church the faithful physically touched the icons (meaning, presumably, with their hands) only once a year, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, a feast which Russians held in particular respect precisely because it licensed

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[35] J. F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 3.

[36] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 44.

[37] For a subtle investigation of the Iconophile ontology of the icon, see M.-J. Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy. The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (ET Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[38] Cited O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 116.

[39] Cited ibid., p. 58.

the ubiquitous presence of the icon, both in church and out of it, on all other days.[40] Fifty years later, the Danish ambassador to the court of Peter I noted that in church Russians kissed the feet and hands on the icons of Christ and his Mother, the lips and faces of icons of the apostles and other saints.[41] Such non-Orthodox reporters, through unfamiliarity with the Liturgy, were unlikely to be aware of the way icons were integrated with particular texts, whether specific to feasts and seasons or in continual use throughout the year. Sacred artworks added up, in fact, to a visual commentary on what was being said or sung.[42] Icon-filled spaces were largely a matter, though, of the *naos* or people's side of the icon-screen, corresponding to the nave of a Western church building. As the late Archpriest John Meyendorff pointed out, it could be said that the *sanctuary* of a Russian church 'contained no images but only mysteries', i.e. the recitation of the Eucharistic anaphora itself.[43] Meyendorff proposed, somewhat tentatively, that the combination of, on the one hand, an icon-rich screen at the end of the nave and, on the other, an (often) imageless sanctuary was an attempt to reproduce architecturally the theological doctrine of the Byzantine Iconophiles. Over against Iconoclast tenets: while holy images are indeed legitimate, the Eucharistic species is not an example of them but, after the consecration, belongs, rather, to the order to which images merely point.[44]

The icon, thus unavoidable in church, was equally visible in the roadways. Paul of Aleppo observed that people would stop to pray every time they passed an icon, even if it meant a hundred pauses in the space of an hour.[45] Viewed by the Danish ambassador in the early eighteenth century, Russians seemed to be constantly praying on the streets.[46] Ubiquity and quantity were as apparent for fixed icons as was mobility for their portable counterparts.

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[40] Ibid., p. 60. The key text in celebration of the icons read out on this occasion is included in H. Whybrew, *Orthodox Lent, Holy Week and Easter. Liturgical Texts with Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1995), pp. 50–52.

[41] Ibid., p. 62.

[42] See J. Ştefănescu, *L'illustration des Liturgies dans l'art de Byzance et de l'Orient* (Brussels: Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales, 1936).

[43] J. Meyendorff, 'The Legacy of Beauty. Liturgy, Art, and Spirituality in Russia', in R. Grierson (ed.), *Gates of Mystery*, op. cit., pp. 37–44, and here at p. 40.

[44] For the Iconoclast teaching that the Eucharist is an image, see S. Gerö, 'The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and its Sources', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975), pp. 4–22.

[45] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 64.

[46] Ibid.

Ubiquity, Quantity, Mobility

The ubiquity of the icon can be connected with the notion of 'Holy Russia', which emerged at the end of the mediaeval period from two sources: the final expulsion of the pagan Tartars who had dominated the region for several hundred years, and the end of the Byzantine empire – the principal Orthodox polity – with the passing of Constantinople under Islamic rule in 1453.[47] In a visually oriented culture, the notion of Moscow as the third Rome fitted well with the project of making Russia into one vast sacred space (a 'Great Icon' in Oleg Tarasov's thought-provoking term),[48] even if, as the historian of mediaeval Rus' Simon Franklin maintains, the importance in 'Muscovite policy, culture, or consciousness' of the idea of 'Moscow not just as the second Kiev but as the Third Rome, taking over the Providential mission and the universal status of Constantinople' can also be overstated.[49]

As to quantity: by the nineteenth century the production of Russian icons could be called industrial in scale, though the process was in fact concentrated in the countryside, specifically in three villages in the province of Vladimir-Suzdal, major centres of icon-painting since at least the seventeenth century. Of all unlikely people, the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a neo-pagan though a good one, became interested in this phenomenon. Enquiring by letter in 1814 through Russian friends in Weimar, he hoped that the empress Maria Fyodorovna might pass on to the relevant officials a request for information. He considered it

> very instructive … that right up to our day an entire branch of art is preserved unchanged from the most ancient of time, thanks to an uninterrupted tradition passed down from Byzantium.[50]

In reply, the governor of Vladimir explained that almost two thousand craftsmen were engaged full-time in this activity in three particular villages. A nineteenth century investigator doing field-work testified that certain craftsmen painting the entire image minus the face were able to turn out up to 600 icons per week,

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[47] A. Solov'ev, *Holy Russia: The History of a Religious-Social Idea* (The Hague: Mouton, 1959). For the introductory phase of that history in the early ideology of the Muscovite tsardom, see J. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretative History of Russian Culture* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), pp. 47–77.

[48] It is striking how many items in the recent encyclopaedia of Russian Orthodoxy published by the Moscow Institute of Russian Civilisation are devoted to notable icons as well as to icon-types and icon-themes. See *Svataya Rus'. Bol'shaya Entsiklopediya Russkogo Naroda. Russkoe Pravoslavie* (Moscow, Institut Russkoi Tsivilizatsii, 2009), 3 vols.

[49] S. Franklin, 'The Origins of Russia and its Culture', in R. Grierson, *Gates of Mystery*, op. cit., pp. 22–36, and here at p. 35.

[50] Cited in A. L. Jenks, *Russia in a Box: Art and Identity in an Age of Revolution* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 17.

which makes the evidence of contemporary statistical tables more credible.[51] For example, the Ministry of Internal Affairs recorded that the village of Palekh alone had produced no less than half a million icons in the course of 1858.[52] This of course implies a huge level of demand, which was served by a country-wide network of merchants and agents. The word 'pedlar' seems a shade too pejorative, especially as many of these salesmen are likely to have been committed Old Believers: one of the villages, Mstera, was known to be a centre of Old Belief (the significance of this schismatic tradition in Russian Orthodoxy in a 'revisiting' of the icon will be considered below).

Despite the ubiquity of icons, they were also expected (as Shevzov graphically describes for the immediately pre-Revolutionary period), to go on walk-about – something which obviously strengthened the icon's role as (in Tarasov's terms) shaper of Russia's sacred space. This could be a matter of individuals carrying with them smallish personal icons on journeys, but it could equally take the form of the multitudinous processions in honour of Church festivals as well as outings meant to add dignity to 'one-off' ecclesiastical and civil events. The icons at the centre of such processions would often be celebrated ones, and almost always they were Marian in character – such as the icon of our Lady of Vladimir, treated as a palladium (or defensive military guardian) of Moscow just as the now lost Constantinople *Hodegitria* icon had been for Byzantium.[53] Like its Constantinopolitan predecessor, the Vladimir icon was regarded as Lucan – either painted directly by the evangelist or copied from his work, for the authority of such apostolically produced icons was understood as transferable.[54] Nineteenth century Russian artists depict such icon processions in either a formalistic Byzantine style, a continuation of mediaeval Russian icon painting as in the 'Meeting with the Icon of the Vladimir Mother of God' in Moscow's Historical and Architectural Museum, or in the Romantic or realist style learned from the contemporary West, as in Konstantin Savitsky's 'Meeting with the Icon' in the Tretyakov Gallery.[55] Naturally enough, icons with a reputation for wonder-working were especially sought after, whether by pilgrimage or by the icon itself going on tour.

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[51] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 55.

[52] A. L. Jenks, *Russia in a Box*, op. cit., p. 20.

[53] H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, op. cit., pp. 73–78.

[54] 'Church tradition ascribed to Luke the creation of three icons of the Mother of God after Pentecost: images of the 'Tenderness' and 'Hodigitria (Showing-the-Way)' types, and also of the Mother of God without the Child. Enveloped as they were with the Evangelist's authority, copies of these icons were supposed to possess special wonder-working power, since they reproduced the genuine features of the Mother of God, as the holy Evangelist witnessed them; and (in words she spoke to Luke) the Mother of God not only approved her icon, but also communicated to it a special power of grace', O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 93.

[55] Illustrations of these artworks will be found in ibid., pp. 70–71.

Normative Versus Thaumaturgical Icons

But if all icons were in some way sanctifying, then the border line between the normative icon and the special thaumaturgical icon was necessarily somewhat porous. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian religious philosopher Evgeny Trubetskoy, who played a major part in the return to favour of the severer style of the mediaeval Russian icon, now more clearly distinguished from its Baroque or Romantic re-workings, thought it necessary to de-mythologise the wonder-working icon by re-expressing the concept of miracle in terms of the healing power of beauty – a concept applicable, no doubt, to icons at large. Trubetskoy, whom I shall shortly take as the first of a quintet of Russian 'theologians of the icon', was writing for the often secularised Russian intelligentsia at the end of the Tsardom and seeking to commend to them both Orthodoxy at large and the older Russian iconographic tradition in particular.

But beyond the circles of the intelligentsia, a wider constituency was interested in miracle in a less metaphorical sense. In the mid nineteenth century the Church already sought to control claims to miracle-working in the case of new or newly discovered icons, usually by re-locating controversial icons in monasteries or other church buildings where any unusual healings or other happenings could be observed, and report made. Writing in the 1830s, the author of a treatise 'On the Holy Wonder-working Icons and the Christian Church', summarised in Tarasov's study, set out to elucidate the relation between icon and miracle.[56] Dmitri Sosnin was inclined to discount the popular belief that icons which appeared mysteriously, for example in the deep forest, were always *acheiropoieta*, images-not-made-by-hands. He thought they were made by hands alright, but surely by, as he put it, 'pure and holy hands'. What might well be miraculous, however, were the signs which often accompanied such findings: an unusual light or a voice. Another miraculous kind of sign was when such icons, or any icons, preserved themselves from destruction in burning buildings or if the building where they were housed collapsed. Finally, and most importantly, wonder-working icons poured out on people gifts of grace, of which the easiest to check were gifts of physical healing. Sosnin warned against supposing all icons miracle-working. Given the sheer number of icons there would have to be a constant stream of miracles if that were the case. But his theology of the thaumaturgical icon could not withstand the force of popular faith in the sanctifying (including healing) power of the icon. For demotic theology, the more icons there were in the world, the more grace was offered.[57]

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[56] D. Sosnin, *O svyatykh chudotvornykh ikonakh v tserkvi khristianskoy* (St Petersburg, 1833), discussed in ibid., pp. 91–92.

[57] Ibid., p. 92.

The Role of the Old Believers

The huge importance of the icon as vehicle of divine presence and aid is shown by the lasting – and in fact still ongoing – split in the Russian church caused by the mid seventeenth century liturgical reforms of the patriarch Nikon which unwittingly brought into being the community, or set of communities, called Old Ritualists or Old Believers. Irreconcilable, as it proved, to the mainstream canonical Church, they enjoyed a substantial following in the old mercantile class as well as among the peasantry, and a not insignificant presence in Russian society at large. By the mid nineteenth century, when the Ministry of the Interior compiled the relevant statistics, their numbers were estimated at eight million: approximately one sixth of the Orthodox population.[58] This would have unexpected art-historical consequences.

The general principle underlying the Nikonian reform was to return the Liturgy to an uncorrupt state by accommodating it to contemporary Greek practice (by the standards of liturgical historians today the Russian practice was actually more authentic than its Greek counterpart so this was a distinctly misguided effort). One important aspect of the reform was a series of apparently small alterations in iconography which, however, though small, were made obligatory. A widely avoided legal requirement that icon-painters should in future sign their names on icons was meant to make possible the penalisation of painters who continued to use the traditional codes. In subsequent generations, Nikonian iconography was open to receive influences from the Catholic West of the Renaissance and later: such concessions to 'Frankish' or 'German' taste were deemed 'carnal' by traditionalists – the plump, well-nourished Christ-child summed this up – and were spurned accordingly.[59]

If the ubiquity of traditional icons had been regarded as a sign of the unique holiness of Russian sacred space, the forbidding of the making and public veneration of such traditional icons *unless and until they had been homogenised with the reform* generated the conviction that the Tsardom had now fallen from grace. In popular Old Believer literature, the outrages suffered by icons either purposely destroyed or at least re-painted so as to conform to New Ritualist requirements could be compared, *mutatis mutandis*, to the sufferings of Christ.[60] Old Ritualist reaction to the reform was from the start extremely hostile but it deepened in intensity during the reign of Peter the Great who, in his attempts to modernise and (up to a point) secularise Russia, abolished among other things the patriarchate and, wherever possible, processions with icons. (It cannot have helped the Russian

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[58] J. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, op. cit., p. 700. Of these eight million, some three million were 'priestless', the rest 'priested'.

[59] There is a famous critique of Westernised images along these lines in the single most important Old Believer text: *The Life of Archpriest Avvakum by Himself* (ET London, 1924), pp. 23–24.

[60] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 192.

establishment that from the late seventeenth century onwards depictions of patron saints with the features of the tsar or his circle become common. The tsarina Catherine the Great was particularly keen on putting in a cameo appearance in images of St Catherine of Alexandria.)[61] The world of official devotion provoked in Old Believers deep feelings of apocalyptic anxiety.

Tarasov asks what symptoms of this shift in world-view can be detected in Old Believer art. The signs are subtle. We may have to allow for a margin of over-interpretation by cultural historians. But from around 1700 the theme of the Last Judgment becomes much more common on domestic icons of Old Ritualist provenance, as does that of the guardian angel, protector against evil, and both of these motifs fit well with an apocalyptic mind-set. The popularity of icons of Christ as 'heavenly tsar' may imply de-recognition of the earthly, Nikonian, tsar in Moscow or St Petersburg.

Many Old Believers would accept icons made by heterodox (i.e. mainstream) painters so long as they kept to the ancient pre-Nikonian symbolism. Others avoided the now ambiguous icons altogether. Some groups of Old Believers considered that neither icon nor sacrament was appropriate in a currently graceless Russia. Tarasov describes how one such sect, the *Ryabinovsky*, worshipped in prayer houses whose inner walls were simply painted black, the only sign allowed an eight-ended cross without a corpus.[62] By contrast, the 'Melchizedeks', another priestless sect of Old Believers, compensated for the lack of a clergy by reciting liturgical prayers (minus the consecratory formulas) over bread and wine placed in front of an icon now deemed to be the emergency channel of Eucharistic consecration in the absence of the 'apostolic succession' of ordained ministers.[63]

The Old Believer schism had an important consequence for the future of the Russian icon: for the study of the icon, for its theological interpretation, and indeed for its continuation as a living tradition of artistic making. The rigour of the Old Believer approach to the icon encouraged the production of icon-painting compendia in the form of both pattern books and books of questions-and-answers on the right way to paint. Some of their sources, like the first Russian collection of church canons, dating from the early sixteenth century, and the text of the (1551) Muscovite 'Council of the Hundred Chapters', were also valued by New

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[61] Ibid., p. 225.

[62] Ibid., p. 160.

[63] The leading community of 'priestless' Old Believers, the Vyg fathers situated in the far north of Russia near the White Sea, were more typical in celebrating not the Eucharist but only Baptism and Confession *in extremis*; for them, *authentic* icons filled the vacuum otherwise left. See R. O. Crumney, 'The Spirituality of the Vyg Fathers', in G. A. Hosking (ed.), *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1991), pp. 23–37; that is not to say they did not see canonical Orthodoxy as under the shadow of Antichrist – as the same writer shows in *The Old Believers and the World of Antichrist: The Vyg Community and the Russian State, 1694–1855* (Madison, NJ: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).

Ritualists.[64] But if the New Ritualists kept the canonical texts in print, it was the Old Ritualists who best observed the provisions they contained.

In this literature, and especially in its Old Believer additions, the status of the iconographer was exalted far beyond what had hitherto been usual, at least so far as our written evidence goes. These texts laid down strict rules of behaviour governing every aspect of the iconographer's life. These included moral norms (practising the virtues, avoiding the vices), and ascetic norms (for prayer, fasting, and spiritual direction), as well as aesthetic norms governing the way in which traditional practice was to be construed. Symptomatically, the two principal 'holy iconographers' of Russia, Andrey Rublev and Maksim the Greek, were venerated as saints by the Old Believers long before their eventual canonisation by the Russian Church in 1988.

The Revival of the Ancient Icon

Until the last couple of decades of the Tsardom, much religious art, both official and popular, exhibited marked contrasts to the traditional icon. Religious painting was subject to changing stylistic fashion, largely governed by attitudes to Western art in the ruling elites, and by the devotional demands of the population at large. With enormous literary verve as well as a rich choice of illustrative material, Tarasov demonstrates the profound influence on Russian iconography from the mid seventeenth century onwards of Western religious art, both as to style (notably Baroque and Romantic) and as to subject. Where the latter is concerned, a wide variety of new themes was depicted. These could be dogmatic (the Visit of the Magi, or Christ as Saviour of the World), or allegorical and moral (hence the painting of icons with such titles as 'Monastic Purity' or 'The Fate of the Righteous Person and of the Sinner'). Even Old Believer icons seem to have borrowed the dark background of Western *arte sacra* paintings, perhaps to express their pessimistic view of the Church's alienated situation. The heightening of the didactic element in their icons, while it could appeal for justification to the Muscovite Council of the Hundred Chapters, might also be said to have mirrored post-Tridentine Catholic art as well.

Yet, taken by and large, Old Believer practice was far closer to the icons of mediaeval Russia than was the case in the mainstream Church, in 'canonical Orthodoxy'. By a seeming paradox (the ancient is modern!), it was the Old Believer approach to the icon which was re-discovered by the Russian avant-garde in the last years of the Tsardom – and the early years of the Bolshevik regime with their

[64] L. Duchesne (ed.), *Le Stoglav ou les Cent Chapitres* (Paris: Champion, 1920). The forty-third 'chapter' concerns icon-painting.

brief flowering of the spirit of cultural and artistic experimentation.[65] In the words, from 1994, of Evgeniia Petrova of the State Russian Museum in St Petersburg:

> These discoveries provoked a wave of national enthusiasm for Old Russian art and encouraged a return to Russian sources by artists as diverse as Mikhail Nesterov and Viktor Vasnetsov on the one hand, and Natalia Goncharova and Kazimir Malevich on the other.[66]

The latter pair are surely among the best known painters of the Russian avant-garde in the contemporary West. That period of avant-garde, from roughly 1890 to 1925, is as much the background to the modern Russian theology of the icon as is the patristic argumentation which continued to be rehearsed in theological literature in the seminaries and University faculties where it differed little, if at all, from its Catholic counterparts in the West.

Naturally, given both the wider Russian background and the peculiar emphases of Old Ritualism, the modern Russian theology of the icon can be expected to give the icon a high dogmatic status and to distinguish it as sharply as possible from all non-Byzantine-Slav modes of Christian art. Typically, indeed, it regards the sacred art of the West as simply religious art, art on religious themes, and restricts the use of the term 'icon', 'iconic', 'iconography', to the liturgical art of the Orthodox Church seen through, as it were, Old Believer spectacles. Seeing Orthodox sacred art through what amount to Old Believer spectacles entails removing from the realm of the genuinely iconic much sacred art produced in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries by Russian Orthodox believers themselves.

What the avant-garde intelligentsia sought was to go behind the Westernised art, which had entered court circles in Russia in the seventeenth century but by the nineteenth century could also be found in the rural workshops of the icon-making villages (archives show that craftsmen there had, torn from illustrated books, reproductions of works by Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Cranach, and others, as well as prints of religious paintings by academic artists in Russia and select pages from popular German histories of art).[67] Oleg Tarasov states flatly that 'in the 18th and 19th centuries … the medieval canon was finally destroyed in official icon painting', owing to the quotation – he means, of course, *visual* quotation – of Catholic and Protestant iconographies.[68] Thus one could compare Maksim Kultepin's 1844 deliberately dramatic (not to say theatrical) 'Adoration

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[65] J. Bowlt, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the 'World of Art' Group* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1979).

[66] E. Petrova, 'Preface', in R. Grierson (ed.), *Gates of Mystery*, op. cit., p. 7; see further on this J. Bowlt, 'Avant-Garde: Sacred Images in the Work of Goncharova, Malevich, and their Contemporaries', in W. C. Brumfield and M. M. Velimirović (eds), *Christianity and the Arts in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 145–151.

[67] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 207.

[68] Ibid., pp. 214–215.

of the Magi' with Peter Paul Rubens' painting of the same subject, originally in Louvain but now in the chapel of King's College, Cambridge, for they are much alike. Again, in one of the icon-villages in the early twentieth century, an icon of the Prophet Elijah ('The Fiery Ascension of the Prophet Elijah', in the Khoklov family collection at Palekh) is clearly based on a German engraving of forty or so years previously. Only the addition of Elisha and the chariot shows we are dealing with a painting in the Byzantine tradition.[69] Here the pattern-books have been left totally to one side. *Contra*, however, Tarasov's theory of rupture, Engelina Smirnova has argued that workers in the painter-villages retained a contact with mediaeval Russian iconography via the possibly over-refined yet nevertheless contemplative miniatures typical of the Muscovite 'Stroganov' school – so named from its merchant patrons – of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[70] But in any case, by the late nineteenth century the Palekh artists were beginning to turn to secular themes – they acquired a new renown for exquisitely decorated lacquer boxes showing scenes from Russian fairy tales or Russian history. This shift of direction would be confirmed in no uncertain manner by the secularism of the Bolshevist regime.[71]

For Tarasov, whatever the intentions of religious artists, acceptance of the Renaissance principle 'Nature is the model; the ancients are the school' could only mean the 'death of the Byzantine canon'.[72] He explains this claim in terms of a theologically sophisticated Orthodox anthropology. The personalities of the saints and even of Christ himself came to be regarded in official art psychologically, as spiritual individuality, expressed in the empirical likeness of this or that person – not ontologically as transformation into the divine image by grace in the case of the saints, or as, in the case of Jesus, the identity of the single hypostasis of the Word

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[69] Kultepin's 'Adoration' and Khoklov's 'The Fiery Ascension of the Prophet Elijah' are reproduced in Tarasov's study at pp. 217 and 221 respectively.

[70] E. Smirnova, 'The Schools of Russian Medieval Painting', in R. Grierson (ed.), *Gates of Mystery*, op. cit., pp. 60–71, and here at p. 70. Tarasov admits the connexion but speaks of the icon-village artists as engaged in a 'falsification and stylization' of Muscovite and especially Stroganov images: thus *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 326.

[71] This is the wider theme of A. L. Jenks' fascinating study, *Russia in a Box*, op. cit. Despite criticism from ultra-Leftists, a number of former icon-painters, who had transferred their energies to fokeloric and patriotic subjects, were celebrated by the Soviet State as 'Honoured Art Workers of the Soviet Union'. It is good to hear that, since the fall of Communism, icon-painting has revived at Palekh, less good to discover that capitalistic 'new Russians' are commissioning scenes of Mercedes cars, naked women in saunas, and hit-gangsters: ibid., pp. 201–202.

[72] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 226. Awareness of the contrast between the Byzantine tradition and later Russian sacred art with its hybridised forms was increased by the rediscovery in 1868 by a scholarly priest, Porfiry Uspensky, of the Neo-Byzantine Greek equivalent to the Old Ritualist manuals, the *Hermineia* or 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysios of Fourna, written in the period 1728 to 1733. See on this P. Hetherington, *The 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fourna* (London: Sagittarius Press, 1974).

Incarnate in both his human and divine natures. Tarasov calls this a shift from 'countenance', which he means to be a philosophically loaded, metaphysically suggestive, term, to 'face', with the latter word's possible connotations of photographic warts-and-all.[73]

The use of oil paint in New Ritualist icons facilitated such realistic depiction which extended to the setting of figures in sometimes highly detailed naturalistic landscapes. Landscape begins to become emancipated from the iconic into a genre of its own, with – inevitably – theological implications concerning a possible separation of nature and grace. Alternatively, where the Western Baroque was an influence, the icon is invaded by complex allegory or sets of emblems, often incorporating texts in the picture. Dated to roughly 1814, an image of 'The Mystery of the Cross', now in the State Museum of the History of Religion at St Petersburg, shows the suffering Christ surrounded by crosses carrying the names of various moral evils that brought the Innocent One to his death.[74] By contrast, Old Ritualists kept aloof from such stylistic tergiversations and, especially in the period from the 1870s to the 1920s, produced or commissioned many new icons in a deliberately archaising manner which included the re-cycling of old board and the use of dark varnish – sometimes done so well that only late twentieth century scientific techniques can date them to the modern period.

When art history began to be established as a discipline in Russia in the later nineteenth century, art historians sought Old Believer help in understanding the traditional icon-types. Heritage-gathering is typical of nineteenth century Romanticism – chiefly, perhaps, among ethnicities that had not yet achieved political nationhood, in possession of their own State-form. The Russian case was different. Not only was its principal manifestation post-Romantic.[75] It was also unique in its intensity. Among the early twentieth century *intelligenty* there took place a veritable explosion of interest in this art – essentially, the sacred art of the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries in the Russian lands – a phenomenon that can be linked to a number of motifs in the culture of the Silver Age. Among those motifs

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[73] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., pp. 224–232.

[74] Ibid., p. 260. Should making the icon more obviously a didactic tool (not necessarily in this particular way) count *in itself* as an example of Westernising? The Council of the Hundred Chapters had wanted images to be useful for religious education, and narrative images with small sub-divisions for the units of a story became more common as a result.

[75] 'Principal' because, during the reign of Nicholas I (coincident with cultural Romanticism), there was already, in the name of conservative nationalism, some concern for the respectful (rather than modernising) restoration of churches, frescoes, icons: see A. L. Jenks, *Russia in a Box*, op. cit., pp. 21–38. Jenks refers his readers here to the opening chapter of a Soviet-period history of the rescue and care of mediaeval Russian art: Y. Bobrov, *Istoriia restavratsii drevnerusskoi zhivopisi* (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1987), pp. 9–26. The wider background is described in E. Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Russia* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1964) and, in the perspective of State policy, N. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825–1855* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1959).

are admiration for the primitive, deliberate cultivation of simplicity in decoration and design, patriotic enthusiasm for forms of Russian culture untouched by the West, continuing interest in the Middle Ages, the Symbolist movement, which was common to both Russia and Western Europe, a desire to find a Russian equivalent for fashionable Western artistic radicalism (Cubism and the like), and even the desire of the last tsar to revive the notion of an Orthodox theocracy by reference to the ideals of sixteenth and seventeenth century Muscovy (the most important single event in the renaissance of the traditional icon was a 1913 exhibition in Moscow, arranged by a newly active 'Committee for the Propagation of Russian Icon Painting', and timed to coincide with the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty).[76] It is not surprising that the art of the traditional icon began to inspire theologically a variety of young laymen in Russia or, after the Revolution, in the Russian diaspora abroad. Trubetskoy wrote in 1916:

> The discovery of the icon is one of the major and at the same time one of the most paradoxical events in the history of Russian culture. Discovery is the word, for until quite recently everything in the icon was hidden from us – its lines, it colors, and above all the spiritual meaning of this unique art. Yet all of our Russian antiquity lived by that meaning. We looked at the icon without seeing it.[77]

The Theology of the Russian Icon

There are five main figures in the twentieth century Russian Orthodox theology of the icon.

Evgenii Trubetskoy (1863–1920)

The earliest is Prince Evgenii Trubetskoy, the dates of whose life locate him firmly in the period of the re-discovery of the traditional icon.[78] Trubetskoy studied law and the history of philosophy at Moscow (choosing, incidentally, Western Christian subjects for this master's thesis, devoted to Augustine, as well as his doctoral dissertation, on the social ideals of the eleventh century Latin church). He held chairs in philosophy in, successively, Kiev and Moscow, where he was instrumental in founding the journal of Orthodox thought *Put'* which became the principal intellectual organ of Russian Orthodoxy when revived after the Revolution by exiles in Paris. In 1917, prior to the publication of his most considerable philosophical work, *Smisl zhizni* ('The Meaning of Life' – a

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[76] O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion*, op. cit., p. 367.

[77] E. Trubetskoy, *Icons. Theology in Color* (ET Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 41.

[78] For his life and a full bibliography of his writings, see V. Zenkovskii, 'Trubetskoy, Evgenii Nikolaevič', in *Svataya Rus'*, op. cit., III., pp. 382–384.

title anathema to Anglo-American philosophers but none the worse for that), Trubetskoy left Moscow and enrolled in the White Army, dying at Novorossisk some three years later.

Trubetskoy's thought identifies the aim of human life as the attaining of a relation between the subject and the world which is *harmonious*, albeit in a sense not so much psychological as ontological.[79] His approach to the icon, while that of a believing Orthodox, needs to be seen in this context.

In a trio of essays on iconology written between 1915 and 1918, Trubetskoy stresses the asceticism of the traditional icon, its high-point reached, he judges, in the fifteenth century. The message of the severe human forms of ancient Russian iconography runs: renunciation and suffering are the only way to moral victory and spiritual transfiguration. Such moral victory and spiritual transfiguration reflect not only the death and resurrection of Christ but also the painful resuscitation of Orthodox self-awareness at the end of the bleak age of Tatar domination in Muscovy. But that implies, then, that the icon's message is entirely positive, and Trubetskoy typically defines that message as the transformation of the entire universe into a temple of God. Writing during the First World War, he calls such a metamorphosis 'the religious hope for peace among all creation'.[80] Drawing on the ambiguity of the Russian word *sobor* which can mean either 'cathedral' or 'gathering',[81] Trubetskoy declares:

> A *sobor* of all creatures as the coming universal peace encompassing angels and men and every breathing creature of the earth – that is the basic idea of the Church, which dominates both our ancient religious architecture and our religious painting.[82]

Influenced as he was by the sophiological elements in the thought of Vladimir Solov'ev, the outstanding religious philosopher of the previous generation, Trubetskoy was especially intrigued by an icon-type, relatively common in Russia, the central figure of which is the personified Wisdom of God. Icons of the divine Wisdom, *Sophia*, shown as a woman – the 'Lady' Wisdom of the sapiential books of the Old Testament[83] – were suggestive of a gracious all-harmony of the world in God, and, as such, highly pertinent to Trubetskoy's intellectual–spiritual scheme. He became convinced that the Sophia icons, associated with both Christ and the Virgin, were theologically crucial.

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79 Ibid., p. 383.

80 E. Trubetskoy, *Icons*, op. cit., p. 16.

81 The 'gatherings in which the authority of God was invoked on all communal activities' gave their name to the Russian cathedral: J. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, op. cit., p. 7.

82 E. Trubetskoy, *Icons*, op. cit., p. 19.

83 As in Proverbs 8 and Wisdom 6–11.

Trubetskoy made two inter-related attempts at explaining what specifically sophianic icons might mean. His more basic interpretation is that:

> the Wisdom embodied in Sophia is the design of God that preceded creation and called all celestial and earthly creatures forth from non-being into being, out of the darkness of night.[84]

In other words, these icons testify to protology, the aboriginal foundation of being in a world conceived in eternity, realised in time. Elsewhere, however, Trubetskoy qualifies this interpretation. The Sophia icons, he proposes, should always be seen in relation to the icon of the Mother and Child, and especially the kind such as that known as 'In thee all creation rejoices'. These singularly attractive compositions (rejected, however, by Old Belief since they post-date the Nikonian reforms) picture Mary and Jesus surrounded by the *sobor* of a transfigured world, with humans, angels, sometimes animals and plants. Such icons add to protology the further dimension of divine incarnation. In his words:

> Sophia the divine Wisdom represents the still undisclosed mystery of God's design for the world, whereas the Virgin, having gathered the world around the Holy Infant, represents the realization and revelation of God's design.[85]

In this sense, divine Wisdom cannot be seen aright except by reference to the Mother of God and the Only-begotten Son.

Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944)

That sapiential perspective is highly relevant to the next of the quintet: an outstanding ornament of the Silver Age – Marxist turned Idealist turned Christian – an academic philosopher who became a priest during the Russian Revolutions of the year 1917.[86] Sergei Bulgakov went on to write, in Parisian exile, a highly original as well as comprehensive dogmatics whose master-idea is precisely that of wisdom, seen along the lines of the Old Testament book of Wisdom: a reality having both a divine, uncreated aspect and a creaturely, and therefore created, one. On Bulgakov's understanding, this wisdom which, so to speak, straddles the frontier between the uncreated and the created is the continuity between God and the world which, he thinks, it is necessary to affirm along with the discontinuity if we are to make sense of such theological topics as the Incarnation, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments, and not least the icons.

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[84] Ibid., p. 52.

[85] Ibid., p. 34.

[86] For an overview of his life and work see A. Nichols, O. P., *Wisdom from Above. A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2005).

Bulgakov's system is called 'sophiology', a word formed, of course, on the basis of the term 'sophia'. He argues that the classical Christology of the Councils omitted to explain what positively it is about creation that renders possible at all the inseparable yet unconfused union of the divine and human natures in the incarnate Word. He thinks that an Incarnation of God in the human is possible because the Logos, as the expression of the mind of God, the Creator, pre-contains the prototypes of all created things, and does so in such a way that these prototypes draw their coherence from their relation with the most important of them, the prototype of humanity, the pre-existing image of God which, when realised as a creaturely reality, in Adam and his descendants, is to be the centre of the created world. As Bulgakov writes in his study *The Icon and its Veneration*, at the basis of figurative art lies:

> the objective and anthropocosmic foundation of the world, the sophianic prototypes according to which, created by Wisdom, it exists.[87]

A theology of the icon needs as its starting-point the sophiological principle for which God as Creator, though not in his own inner life, is figurable, and the world, with man as its significant centre, is configured in his image. That sophiological starting-point was fully actualised in the unique moment of the Incarnation when the divine humanity pre-existing in God took flesh as the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.

Bulgakov has a rich account of the content of iconography which reflects his Russian Orthodox background and context. Not surprisingly, he gives pride of place to the icon of Christ. For Bulgakov one important difference between an icon of Christ and a human portrait is that, as the New Adam, the Saviour is a super- or pan-individual. In some sense his face 'contains' all particular individuals, or, conversely, each human face has something of the face of Christ about it. To represent the God-man, however, the icon-painter must have not only artistic skill but a pertinent vision, and this is only possible when, as he puts it, 'the creative demands of art are joined with ecclesial experience'.[88]

What other images does Bulgakov admit? For several centuries Russian Orthodoxy had been riven with disputes over whether the first Trinitarian person, the Father, might be portrayed in art. To signify the Son's likeness to the Father, the Father's iconography, so Bulgakov reports, has attracted to itself the human iconology of the incarnate Son. Bulgakov has some qualms about such images but he is inclined to allow that, for sophiology, by virtue of the humanity in divinity of the pre-incarnate Lord (which quality, like all his qualities, the Logos, the second Trinitarian person, takes from his Source, the first Trinitarian person), an anthropomorphic portrayal of the Father of the Son is just about legitimate. What, then, about the portrayal of the Holy Trinity as the three angels who make up the

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87 S. Bulgakov, *Ikona i ikonopochitanie* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1931), p. 74.

88 Ibid., p. 107.

theophany at the Oak of Mamre in the Book of Genesis, and were most famously depicted by Andrey Rublev? Bulgakov argues that there is no formal attempt in this icon-type to depict either Father or Spirit, since the emphasis lies not on the personal differentia of each angel but their Trinitarian correlation. Moreover, as this same image reminds us, the Holy Spirit has no distinctive icon: that testifies to how the revelation of his hypostasis, as distinct from the gifts he makes available in his economy, belongs not to the present world-order but to the age to come.

Angels can be iconised owing to what Bulgakov calls their co-humanity, by which he means the way in which their existence is partly defined by the mission they have to engage with, and inter-act with, the human race. Bulgakov treats as an innovative use of angel imagery the characteristically Russian icons of Sophia to which Trubetskoy first drew attention. For Bulgakov, the central sophianic figure of these icons, especially in the Novgorod school, is (as we saw in connexion with Trubetskoy) a fiery angel on an altar, above which we find representations of Christ and what Bulgakov takes to be the 'heaven' of the archetypal ideas of the cosmos. Then on either side of the Sophia figure is the Mother of the Lord and St John the Baptist. On Bulgakov's interpretation, the icon shows the eternal humanity of God revealing itself in the created world. It has its primary expression in the God-man, but it also has ancillary expressions in Mary and John who are pre-eminent examples of spiritual humanity, as well as in the realm of the angels.

Bulgakov also considers images of the saints. Since Christ is, in the words of Paul's letter to the Galatians, 'formed' in them, they constitute aspects of his multi-faceted visage. The icon-painter portrays the holy person as glorified, not as they were on earth, though certain traits of the individual's likeness may be preserved.

Icons of the Mother of God are especially numerous, varied, beloved, and beautiful, and Bulgakov's high Mariology encourages him to do them full justice. He considers them first in relation to Christ. The Mother and Child is the primal image of the Incarnation: earthly humanity united to heavenly humanity and so a sophianic image par excellence. He also views Marian images in relation to the Holy Spirit. When Mary appears without the child that, for Bulgakov, is because she is being portrayed as absolutely transparent to the Spirit, the third Trinitarian person. Bulgakov considers there are also icons that show Mary in her relation to the Church: that is his interpretation of the Sophia icons of the Kiev school, where the house or temple of Wisdom is replicated in Mary surrounded by the prophets and apostles. Finally, Bulgakov deals with Marian images in their relation to the cosmos, as in the icon 'In thee all creation rejoices'. This icon-type tells us that in Mary the sophianity of the entire created realm finds a voice. In all the icons discussed, so Bulgakov stresses, Mary is presented not as a 'lovely lady', which he thinks is the case in Western sacred art, but beyond her earthly fate, though not separated from it. He is not surprised that, for Russian piety, wonder-working icons of the Mother of God are more numerous than wonder-working icons of Christ. Christ after all can give himself to us in the Eucharist and in the Gospels, which are his verbal icons, as well as in the Holy Name of Jesus which, like a number of Russian monastic theologians in the immediately pre-Revolutionary

period, Bulgakov identifies as mediating a special mode of presence of Christ. Moreover, the sheer quantity of Marian icons bespeaks Mary's closeness to the world whose life and suffering she shares.

All in all, these various icon-types constitute what Bulgakov calls the Church's iconic canon. This canon, he stresses, is stable but not absolutely fixed. Just as the life of the Church is inexhaustible thanks to the Holy Spirit, so new icons appear to manifest that life: Rublev's Trinity, the Novgorod icons of Wisdom, the cosmic Marian icons, are examples of this. It was the mistake of the Old Ritualists to suppose that the canon is completely closed, and that only what Bulgakov terms 'servile copying' is permissible (the phrase echoes Florensky, but is put, evidently, to quite different use). The canon is not an external rule, but an objective expression of the Church's tradition, itself a living memory capable of generating new configurations in art.[89]

Pavel Florensky (1882–1937)

My third figure, the polymath Pavel Florensky, after re-discovering Orthodoxy in 1903, pursued a twofold career as priest-professor at the Moscow Theological Academy where he was editor of its journal, taught philosophy and practised as a researcher in mathematics and physics (his master work, the 1914 *Stolp I utverzhdenie isstini*, 'The Pillar and Ground of the Truth', combines all the disciplines involved). After a decade of forced service to the Bolshevik government in physics and engineering science – an alternative to permanent exile – he was imprisoned by the Communist authorities in 1933 on the charge of counter-revolutionary activities. As KGB files which first came to light in 1992 indicate, Florensky was executed at the Solovki *gulag* in 1937.[90]

In his highly original if sometimes difficult study *Iconostasis* (to which, in connexion with the introduction of machine-made icons, reference has already been made), Florensky uses the Aristotelian theory of causality to explain the icon's status. The material cause of the icon consists of wood and paint, but the object cannot be understood without appeal to its 'final' cause – in other words, that for the sake of which it exists, and this is the vision of God. The beatific vision is the end that re-specifies the use of the materials that go to make up the icon. For Florensky, the 'true' icon-painters are not the actual iconographers working in the villages of the Suzdal religion or wherever. The true icon-painters are the

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[89] See further A. Nichols, O. P., 'Sergei Bulgakov on the Art of the Icon', in idem., *Redeeming Beauty*, op. cit., pp. 72–88. For an attempt to compare and contrast Bulgakov's iconology with the Western theology of the image of a younger Catholic contemporary, see idem., 'Hans Urs von Balthasar and Sergii Bulgakov on Holy Images', in W. van den Bercken and J. Sutton (eds), *Aesthetics as a Religious Factor in Eastern and Western Christianity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 1–24.

[90] For his life, see the 'Introduction' by Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev in P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, op. cit., pp. 5–29.

Fathers of the Church who, as he puts it, 'create the art because they are the ones who contemplate the persons and events that the icon must depict' – persons and events seen in their relation to, precisely, the vision of God.[91] Of course, if the Fathers *are* the 'real' icon-painters then there is not much point in seeking to identify individual patristic writers who commented favourably on the making and venerating of artworks. That obsession of both ancient controversialists and twentieth century scholars becomes otiose, superfluous.

That is not to say that Florensky pays no attention at all to the writings generated, above all, by the Iconoclastic crisis of the eighth and ninth centuries, but such attention as he does pay is focussed on correcting what he sees as endemic modern misunderstandings of the dogmatic definition of Nicaea II. He has in mind the way that, for the definition, the image makes us 'remember' the persons and events it depicts. Florensky warns that this

> is not at all a question of the subjective recollectedness of art, but of Platonic 'recollection', *anamnêsis* – a manifestation of the idea in the sensible …

In his characteristic vocabulary, the icon is not a psychological event. It *is* an event, but the event is ontological in kind. As he explains:

> [A]rt leads us out of a subjective seclusion, bursts the boundaries of the conventional world, and, beginning with images and through the medium of images, brings us to the archetype.[92]

Icon-painting, insists Florensky, is not an ancient fine art. It is 'a way of attaining supersensible perception'.[93] Florensky's thinking has a genuine anchorage in the Nicaea II definition where the latter speaks of the passage from image to prototype.

Since Florensky gave his study of the icon the title *Iconostasis*, the developed icon screen of a Russian Orthodox church building is, unsurprisingly, an important reference point for him. Conscious that, to Western observers, the icon-screen looks like a wall separating the sanctuary from the nave, and thus an interruption of the vision of the central liturgical act by the laity, Florensky turns this argument on its head. He argues that the absence of an iconostasis between the altar and the *naos*, the body of the church, is what would in fact erect a solid wall, spiritually speaking, because the transcendent meaning of the altar would then be occluded, blocked. If the icon-screens were pulled down, altars would 'vanish from our consciousness'.[94] The material iconostasis 'opens windows' in such a wall of opacity and, consequently, non-communication. For those whose eyes are

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[91] Ibid., p. 67.

[92] Idem., 'Molennye ikony prepodnogo Serija', *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhi* 9 (1969), p. 80, cited B. Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (ET Lisse, 1976), p. 21.

[93] P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, op. cit., p. 67.

[94] Ibid., p. 63.

appropriately adjusted, the icons are glass that permits us to see what lies beyond them, i.e. the 'holy ones', that is, the saints gathered around the Mother and the Son. This explains why Florensky can call the destruction of icons the blocking up of windows. As he writes:

> A window is either light or else mere wood and glass, but it is never simply a window … An icon is therefore always either more than itself in becoming for us an image of a heavenly vision or less than itself in failing to open our consciousness to the world beyond the senses – then it is merely a board with some paint on it.[95]

An important concept in Florensky's theology of the icon is the idea of 'countenance' (in Russian, *lik*) which he distinguishes from that of 'face' (in Russian, *litzo*), which must be, surely, the source of the same binomial contrast we found in Oleg Tarasov.[96] By the human 'face' Florensky means the appearance of other humans registered naturally, with the accent on psychology. Where human beings have not initiated, through co-operation with grace, a process of deification by an asceticism which leads to selflessness, face is all they have for an artist to show. But through grace, face becomes countenance and is transfigured by the inner beauty which radiated out physically from saints like Stephen the first martyr as described in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, or the exceedingly popular nineteenth century Russian hermit saint Seraphim of Sarov, of whose transfiguration there are eye-witness accounts. Countenance is what icon-painters most properly depict when images of holy people is what they are painting. Florensky writes:

> Icons empirically define those holy countenances that sacred significance has permeated, those hyper-empirical 'ideas' that make heavenly vision accessible to almost everyone; and the icon-painter becomes the witness to these Witnesses, giving us the images … of his vision.[97]

All of which helps us to understand what he is driving at in the otherwise bewildering claim that 'Iconostasis is the saints themselves'.

> If everyone praying in a temple were wholly spiritualized, if everyone praying were truly to see, then there would be no iconostasis other than standing before God Himself, witnessing to Him by their holy countenances and proclaiming His terrifying glory by their sacred words. But because our sight is weak and our prayers are feeble, the Church, in Her care for us, gave us visual strength for

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95 Ibid., p. 65.

96 Ibid., pp. 50–53.

97 Ibid., p. 68.

> our spiritual brokenness: the heavenly visions on the iconostasis, vivid, precise, illumined, that *articulate*, materially cohere, an image into fixed colours …[98]

Paul Evdokimov (1901–1970)

My fourth figure is Paul Evdokimov, whose great book, 'Art of the Icon: Theology of Beauty', published in the year of his death, is interested, up to a point, in a dialogue with Western art – more interested than are the others, anyway. Evdokimov was born in St Petersburg, the son of a senior army officer assassinated in the wake of the 1905 revolution, and received his education at the Cadets' training college of the imperial Russian army. Beginning theological studies (an unusual choice for a young man of military background) in 1918, he was soon caught up in the civil war that followed on the Revolution of October 1917, and in 1920, with nearly a million others, fled Russia for the West. In Paris he lived at first by a variety of manual jobs but a scholarship to the Institut Saint-Serge (where he was taught by Bulgakov) put him on the lifelong road to theology which would be his.[99]

Though he has little to say about the sacred art of the West (his non-Orthodox contacts were more with the Reformed than with Catholics), Evdokimov respects the Western tradition of figurative art. He applauds the overthrow of so-called academic art by the late nineteenth century French Impressionists, but deplores the era they ushered in. From Expressionism and Cubism to Vorticism and beyond, that era abandoned the tradition of figuration as hitherto known. It introduced into art what Evodkimov considers a series of pseudo-ontologies and abortive eschatologies. These are failed attempts at transcendence: misconstruals of the world and of the goal of human life. At one point he calls much twentieth century art best suited to the 'mural decoration of Hell'.[100] He makes a partial exception for abstract art which he considers at a natural level a form of asceticism, a desire to have done with the ambiguities figuration involves, and in this sense an expression of nostalgia for a lost innocence. But the way in which abstract art, through refusing all the forms of this world, appeals to the 'wholly other' (a phrase Evdokimov takes from contemporary Protestant dogmatics) is, in the last analysis, a dead end.[101] It cannot deliver the goods of transcendence. It is a dematerialisation which devalues the world. The only real transcendence lies in a quite different direction, in what Evdokimov terms 'theomaterialism'.

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98 Ibid., pp. 62–63.

99 For his life, see the short biography and testimonies by family and friends published as 'Paul Evdokimov: témoin de la beauté de Dieu' in *Contacts* XXIII/73–74 (1971), pp. 7–271. A general overview of his thought is offered in O. Clément, *Orient-Occident. Deux Passeurs: Vladimir Lossky et Paul Evdokimov* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1985), pp. 105–196, where the author draws in part on material he had offered in the memorial number of *Contacts*.

100 P. Evdokimov, *L'Art de l'Icône* (Paris: Desclée, 1970), p. 76.

101 Ibid., p. 83.

Evdokimov accepts Bulgakov's sophiology. Of all philosophical approaches it is, he says, the most congruent with the experience of art. Art uses a language whose elements are sophianic. The artist captures the sophianic aspect of the creature.[102] But actually Evdokimov lays far more emphasis on pneumatology, the work of the Holy Spirit, and on eschatology as the anticipation of the consummation of creation made possible here and now by the Spirit in his service of the work of the Son. The Holy Spirit is for Evdokimov the 'divine Iconographer', who manifests the Son as the Son of the Father, while himself remaining silent and invisible.[103]

Unlike Bulgakov, Evdokimov accepts the Byzantine theology of the icon associated with St Theodore the Studite, according to which what appears in the icon of Christ is neither his divine nature nor his human nature as such but rather his hypostasis, his unique person which is the same in both these natures, and now, having taken flesh, can be circumscribed and depicted.[104] Evdokimov takes this idea and runs with it. He applies it by extension to the depictions of the Mother of God and the saints, and, above all, he gives it an eschatological 'spin'.[105] The depiction in the icons of hypostases – persons – who by asceticism and holiness have opened themselves to the perfect realisation of existence in God, this surpasses all other art because it is an anticipation of the final fullness of creation, which can only be found in a new relation to uncreated Wisdom, and not simply the created wisdom with which the non-iconographic artist is dealing.

Art as such, thinks Evdokimov, will always be more formally perfect than the icon since the icon not only does not seek such formal perfection but would be harmed by it, because it would become de-centred, side-tracked from its function as an expression of the mystery of deification through Jesus Christ. The art of the icon is Christian art *par excellence* since it expresses Christianity's theological attitude to the world which is one of what he calls 'eschatological affirmation', meaning, in his words, 'ceaseless surpassings, *dépassements*, which opens everything to the Beyond'.[106] In a world towards which this is the objectively correct affective attitude, the vocation of art as hitherto practised will be to die and be raised – be raised into the condition of an epiphanic art whose culminating expression is the icon. All art should seek to penetrate the *logos*, the divinely founded reality of things, things as divinely thought by their Creator. But the *logoi* of things are purposive, goal-directed. Only the icon can lead art to grasp that *logos* in the transfigured form which it will inherit eschatologically since only the art is, as Evdokimov puts it, an 'opened window onto the Eighth Day': the term

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102 Ibid., pp. 76–78.

103 Ibid., p. 13.

104 Ibid., p. 33.

105 The strongly eschatological cast of Evdokimov's thought is well captured in P. C. Phan, *Culture and Eschatology. The Iconographical Vision of Paul Evdokimov* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1985); a brief account can be found in A. Nichols, O. P., *Light from the East. Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1995), pp. 194–204.

106 P. Evdokimov, *L'Art de l'Icône*, op. cit., p. 60.

which the Liturgy and the Church Fathers use for the completion of creation. The art of the icon, whatever its historical period, is radically new compared with all other kinds of art.

Leonid Ouspensky (1902–1987)

The last of my quintet, Leonid Ouspensky, is its only member to have been a practitioner of traditional icon painting and not simply a theoretician. Ouspensky is the least philosophical and the most historically minded of these five authors, but his is also the most dramatic story. He first emerged onto the public square as a schoolboy radical during the Bolshevik revolution when he took a lead in 'Sovietising' his school and neighbourhood, bringing vigilantes into cottages to seize and destroy icons as hate-worthy symbols of subservience to theocracy. Taken prisoner by the White Army in the Caucasus, he found himself under sentence of death. With the defeat of the anti-Red forces Ouspensky was, instead, evacuated from the Crimea to Bulgaria from where, with thousands of others, he was 'head-hunted' by French industrialists desperate for manual labourers after the decimation of the male population in France in the Great War. When in Paris he enrolled for evening classes in an art school run by Tolstoy's daughter and painted his first icon for a bet, almost for a joke. The experience staggered him and it was by means of it that he was converted, or re-converted, to the Orthodox Church. His money ran out for more painting classes so instead he studied icons he found in Parisian antique shops, calling them his 'true professors'. For the rest of his life he taught and practised not only painting but restoring, in addition to woodcarving, stone-carving and metalwork, as well as writing about the theology of the icon, which is our concern here.

The *acheiropoieta* and the claims of the so-called Lucan icons are important to Ouspensky, not because he necessarily accepts the historicity of such claims, but owing to the wider implication they carry. Whatever one makes of the claim that divine power was causally at work in the making of certain ancient images, at the level of *symbolism* such images offer a striking testimony to the basic Christian affirmation: the divine Father by a free initiative of merciful love has given the world his own perfect image in his incarnate Son who is indeed 'not made by hands'. So for Ouspensky the iconic has existed since the apostolic period, indeed, since the time of Christ himself, at least in the sense that, with the Incarnation, the divine makes itself known in the visual order. Following St John Damascene, Ouspensky finds in Old Testament texts which underline how at Sinai Israel heard the word but saw no image (notably Deuteronomy 4: 12) a mysteric indication of the future possibility of seeing and representing the divine in the flesh.[107] That possibility was in fact realised in the visible narrative of the principal events of the life of the incarnate Word. Accordingly, images in one form or another

[107] St John Damascene, *Treatise on the Holy Images* I. 8, I. 16, and III. 8; cf. L. Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'Icône dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe* (Paris: Cerf, 1980), p. 20.

will be inseparable from the economy of the Word. In the future, as revelation is transmitted, not only will the words of Christ be mediated by orally proclaimed texts and sanctify human hearing, but his visual impact and the impact of his actions will be mediated by images and sanctify human sight. Once again, this is teaching from John of Damascus, which Ouspensky makes his own.[108] The Word incarnate, the image of the invisible God (Colosssians 1: 15), let himself be seen in the temple of his body which was indeed not made by hands.[109]

It follows from the Christological foundations Ouspensky has just laid that the role of the icon in the Church is fully complementary to that of Scripture. As he writes in his last and most comprehensive book on icons, *La théologie de l'Icône dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe*:

> In the eyes of the Church, the icon is not, then, an art illustrative of Sacred Scripture; it is a language that corresponds to Scripture, that is equivalent to it, corresponding not to the letter of Scripture, nor to the book [the Bible] as an object, but to the Gospel preaching, which means to Scripture's very content, to its meaning, just as the texts of the Liturgy do. That is why the icon plays in the Church the same role as Scripture, it has the same significance, liturgical, dogmatic, educational.[110]

Ouspensky underlines the task given the icons in the spiritual lives of believers as he unfolds the implications of this bold statement. The icon yields up the content of Scripture, not in a theoretical way, as some particularly excellent textbook of dogmatics might do, but after the fashion of the Church's worship – namely, 'in a living way, addressing itself to all the human faculties'. It transmits the truth of Scripture 'in the light of the whole spiritual experience of the Church, of her Tradition'. Icon and Liturgy, the liturgical image and the liturgical word, reinforce each other in such a way that, by their joint means, 'Scripture lives in the Church and in each of her members'.[111]

For Ouspensky, the icon is more than an aesthetic reality. It expresses the beauty of holiness, which is sharing in the divine life. It reflects the spiritual experience of the saints, from the apostles onward, and invites Christians to follow the path of discipleship to the glory of the Kingdom. The use of line and colour in the art of the icon is ordered to expressing the effect of uncreated grace on human nature. The icon is incomprehensible without a grasp of Christian asceticism. It is a figural expression of the ascetic discipline that, through grace, can lead all the members of the Church to holiness. It manifests prayer, stimulates prayer, and requires an

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[108] St John Damascene, *Treatise on the Holy Images* I. 22; cf. L. Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'Icône dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe*, op. cit., p. 24.

[109] Ibid., pp. 29, 32.

[110] Ibid., p. 121; cf. E. Trubetskoy, *Icons*, op. cit., pp. 9–10.

[111] L. Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'Icône dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe*, op. cit., pp. 151–152.

atmosphere of prayer from would-be iconographers, those who want to use their skills to shape sacred images in line with the tradition of the Church. The icon is a stranger to sentimental (or even unsentimental) naturalism, which simply imitates the unsaved state of things, just as, equally, it is alien to an artistic abstractionism that would ignore the Incarnation, when God took on human form, a human figure.

Ouspensky was concerned to revive in contemporary iconography a number of features of historic Russian practice. In the iconostases he painted for churches he insisted on the placing of the *Deêsis* on the uppermost tier (in many Orthodox churches it had been displaced by an image of the Last Supper), even threatening to resign a commission unless the patron agreed to add this element to the scheme, however tardily.[112] He continued the pre-Revolutionary Russian tradition of painting for clients tiny folding versions of an iconostasis, with a family's patron saints prominently (but not over-prominently) displayed, as in the triptych he worked towards the end of his life, in 1985, for the son and daughter-in-law of the dogmatician Vladimir Lossky with whom he had written a study of iconology which appeared simultaneously in German and English in 1952.[113] In portrait icons, he depicted a selection of figures corresponding to the full gamut of Russian sanctity, from the ascetic Basil the Fool in Christ and the monastic founder Sergius of Radonezh to the hermit Seraphim of Sarov, the spiritual father Ambrose of Optino, and the bishop and author Tikhon of Zadonsk. As already mentioned, he worked not only in metals and stone but – very frequently, in fact – in carved wood, in the spirit of the craftsmen of the Russian North. Not least worthy of note is the austerely moving crucifix he made for Bulgakov's grave in the Russian cemetery at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, outside Paris.[114] Stylistically, Ouspensky found the icon's optimal form in the Russian painting of the fourteenth century, which prized the sheer spirituality of the figures, rather than perfection of line or sumptuousness of colouristic treatment. The icon 'represents not the corruptible flesh that is destined to decomposition, but the transfigured flesh, illumined by grace, the flesh of the Age to Come'.[115] Hence the special importance Ouspensky accords to the icon of the Transfiguration of Christ. In effect, all icons, to Ouspensky's mind, reflect the Transfiguration.

> By material means, visible to carnal eyes [the icon] transmits the divine beauty and glory. That is why the Fathers call the icon venerable and holy – because it transmits the deified condition of its prototype and bears his (or her) name. That

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[112] S. Doolan, *La redécouverte de l'Icône. La vie et l'oeuvre de Léonide Ouspensky* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), p. 44.

[113] Ibid., p. 47. The co-authored book is *Der Sinn von Ikonen / The Meaning of Icons* (Berne-Olten: Urs-Graf Verlag, 1952). A third edition of the English version was published by St Vladimir's Seminary Press at Crestwood, New York, in 1989.

[114] Illustrated in S. Doolan, *La redécouverte de l'Icône*, op. cit., p. 66. Ouspensky also sculpted the grave cross of his friend Vladimir Lossky, shown in ibid., p. 81.

[115] L. Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'Icône dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe*, op. cit., p. 143.

> is why the grace proper to the prototype is found there. In other words, it is the grace of the Holy Spirit that sustains the holiness both of the person represented and of their icon, and it is in that grace that the relation between the Christian and the saint mediated by the icon comes about. The icon shares, so to speak, in the holiness of its prototype and by way of the icon we in our turn share in that holiness in our prayer.[116]

Ouspensky emphasises, finally, the cosmic aspect of iconography and this returns us to Trubetskoy where we started. Here he refers particularly to certain later types of Russian icons – those known as 'Let every breath praise the Lord' and 'In thee rejoices the whole creation' – which embody the theme of the unity of creation, from beast to angel, around the Saviour.

> Harmony and peace re-established, the Church embracing the whole world, this is the central thought of Orthodox sacred art, governing architecture as much as painting.[117]

But even in more traditional icons (not those that portray the *sobornost* or 'togetherness' of all creation, but simply, for example, some particular saint), the changed aspect of the environment of the sacred figure (whether this environment be human beings, landscape, animals, architecture, or a combination of some or all of these) is meant to signify the harmonious order of the Kingdom to come. It is not the 'integrity of creation' here-and-now with which the icon is primarily concerned, but rather the integrity of the transfigured creation, when the mineral, vegetable and animal orders come to participate through human holiness in the divine glory.

According to Ouspensky, the icon tells us not of the wisdom of the world but of the folly of God in the re-creating love that took him to the Cross. It speaks of the new order of the new creation, unheard-of joy when the sufferings of Christ, and, empowered by him, the ascesis of the saints, grant victory over sin and death.

Conclusion

The richness of the Russian 'reception' of the Byzantine icon in both creative practice and faithful theologising is overwhelming. Is it also overdone? A modern Western Christian might be inclined to think so. Whether he or she would be faithful to the mediaeval and early modern Catholic West in so thinking is another matter. Coming closer to our own time: John Henry Newman suggested that, in the England of his contemporaries, a high doctrine and practice of the image – conspicuous there by its rarity – was a sign of an advanced Christian sensibility,

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116 Ibid., p. 144.

117 Ibid., p. 169.

a symptom of progress on the road of holiness, precisely because it marked one out from the crowd.[118] On Newman's presuppositions, the iconic saturation of the historic Russian culture would not as such argue for widespread excellence in Christian discipleship. Quality of attention to what the icons signify is crucial. And with this latter statement we may agree.

Yet a human world where the icons beckon from all sides is still a world semiotically charged with the truth-values of Christian revelation. The objectivity of that is worthy of recognition. Prior to the response of individuals, already there is grace. There is a case, here, in the Catholic context, for looking again at such practices as grouping holy images on the wall of a home, for the use of the 'domestic church'; the erection or careful preservation of wayside images; the use of processional images in the form, especially, of banners, a particular glory of Catholic-minded Anglicanism where the skills their making required were well developed, when the Church goes public on procession through countryside or town.[119]

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[118] C. S. Dessain (ed.), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, XX (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 471.

[119] There are some comments on the need to refresh such practices in: A. Nichols, O. P., *Epiphany. A Theological Introduction to Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), pp. 336, 448.

Chapter 6
Paul Claudel on Sacred Art

The poet and dramatist Paul Claudel was saluted by theologians as diverse as Jacques Maritain and Henri de Lubac, Charles Journet and Hans Urs von Balthasar. I note that in each of these pairings, the first member can be called a 'classical' Thomist, the second a protagonist of the – very different – neo-patristic and philosophically innovative '*nouvelle théologie*'. This testimony is not, then, unimpressive. His contribution to the imaginative celebration of the Christian tradition is, in its broad outlines, many-sided.[1] What was his approach to, more specifically, sacred art?

While Claudel was a contemporary of the Orthodox theoreticians of the icon in the Parisian diaspora, his powerful attachment to the spirit and forms of Latin Catholicism make it unlikely that he will have read their works. Yet though, as we shall see, his initial approach to visual art seems, in that perspective, a million miles distant, his eventual conclusion marches happily enough with theirs.

Claudel's Initial Approach to Visual Art

Usefully, he himself puts the question, 'What is a painting?'[2] A painting, he replies, is

> a real or imaginary portion of space and time which it is the vocation of the painter artfully to withdraw from fleetingness (*la fuite*).

And Claudel explains this is not a matter of an 'imposed immobility', since it results not from 'incarceration in a frame' but, rather, from the 'concert of interior elements whereby they impede each other from passing'.[3] That 'concert' is what Claudel means by a painting's *composition*, the way a given artist uses line, colour, and volume in their juxtaposed combination. Claudel sets up a strong contrast between, on the one hand, poet, dramatist, and composer, who are essentially concerned with what passes, and, on the other, the painter whose domain is what remains or abides, co-existing, and by its sheer presence explains how this is so.

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[1] A. Nichols, O. P., *The Poet as Believer. A Theological Study of Paul Claudel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011).

[2] 'L'Art religieux', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose* (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1965), p. 111.

[3] Ibid.

Claudel is aware he is going against the grain of twentieth century art criticism or, at any rate, preferences in art, when he uses this concise statement of a fundamental aesthetic to defend, almost as privileged examples, genre painting and, especially, the historical painting once favoured by academic art in France and to which the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements were a reaction. It fits perfectly with the logic of his understanding of the visual artwork that it should attend to historic moments, when 'convergent forces' enter into relations such that in their totality they acquire the 'dignity of a meaning, the lasting value of a teaching, a parable'.[4] The encounter, perhaps the shock, *le heurt*, of the diverse 'presences' convoked at the scene generates a 'reciprocal interrogation'.[5] This, Claudel appears to be saying, perfectly exemplifies the nature of painterly composition with its reciprocally defining elements in concert.

Still, whether the subject is historical or not, the gauge of the 'inspiration' of the artist will be the extensiveness of the field-of-play of painterly signs, the richness of his choice of means, the delicacy of the 'accord' reached, and the powerfulness with which the spectator is appealed to, her attention arrested.

The Contribution of Christianity

Claudel found an inner affinity between Christianity and visual art so understood. The incarnational and sacramental principles inherent in the former cannot but lend themselves to an enhanced appreciation of the latter.

> All that religion which is ours insists on the importance of material things, whereof the sacraments are made, and which truly exist only for their meaning, their spiritual significance.[6]

If visible things lead us to know things invisible, as St Paul maintains in the Letter to the Romans (1: 20), Claudel is inclined to say the converse is equally true. Invisible realities lead us to know better what is visible. Revelation confers on a host of sensuous things far-reaching symbolic resonance which renders nature a speaking book. The 'words' of natural things (including that natural being we call *homo sapiens*), once conjugated in syntactical form, become those whole sentences and even paragraphs we term history – and history too has its privileged moments which make up the *sacred* history of the Bible continued as this is in the lives of the saints. The 'pull' (Claudel uses the English word alongside the French *la traction*) of Scripture and hagiography, with their exemplary embodiments of

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., p. 112.

6 Ibid.

religious and social attitudes, was, so Claudel suspected, more powerful on the spirit of an artist that could be any self-contained natural object, *une nature morte*.[7]

That will not deter Claudel from admiring the seventeenth century Dutch school which, along with the Spanish painting of the same period, stimulated some of his best writing on art.[8] But it does encourage him to venture into more theological waters in an apologia for Christian art explicitly as such – as well as a robust critique of the hard times on which, in mid twentieth century, sacred art had fallen, at any rate in France.

Claudel divided the chronology of Christian art into three epochs, dubbed in turn 'hieratic', 'symbolic', and 'idealist'. The first includes early Christian and Byzantine art as well as the continuation of the latter among the modern Orthodox. Here art is fully integrated into ritual, following iconographic canons which are, eventually, as strict as those governing the rites themselves. This art does not seek chiefly to instruct or to arouse emotion or even, says Claudel, perhaps unadvisedly, directly to give glory to God. Its aim is, rather:

> to constitute around the Cross, around the Panaghia and the Pantokrator, an ensemble of official presences, a court, a choir, a permanent clergy on the walls, a pictorial furniture, the two-dimensional guardian of the iconostasis, the delegation of the Angels and Saints to which, on festival days, the earthly throng is joined.[9]

Not for nothing was the most frequently encountered of the building-types of the ancient Church the basilica, the 'imperial house', where the Sovereign dwells with his court.

In the church buildings of the Romanesque and Gothic, Christian art in the West has a rather different end in view. Its controlling 'idea' takes the *domus ecclesiae* to be not only the dwelling of God but the locus of human transaction with him. What is 'brought to the altar' in one of the great Gothic cathedrals is nothing less than

> the whole exterior City in a scaffolding of relations and measures superimposed and multiplied around us from all sides.[10]

Since there is proportion, there is also, argues Claudel, conversation as well. Everything of reality that was ushered, symbolically speaking, into the cathedral began to talk of God – like the disparate materials brought, conceptually speaking, into a high mediaeval *Summa*. Themes tumble out from a huge repertoire – nature

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[7] Ibid., p. 113.

[8] See 'Introduction à la peinture hollandaise', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., pp. 169–211; 'La Peinture espagnole', in ibid., pp. 211–238.

[9] 'Note sur l'Art chrétien', in ibid., p. 121.

[10] Ibid., p. 122.

and the seasons, daily occupations, morality, and history – and help to render the building as a whole an 'enormous Parable'. The centre-point of the discourse remains, however, the conversation between 'the Saints and the faithful, the people and the Bible'. The 'Senate' – the divine assembly – once fixed in the liturgical gold of the Byzantines has not now disappeared. Instead, it has been 'animated', brought to life, made a 'presence in act, living and diverse, a multiple *representation*, in the pictorial and theatrical sense of the word'.[11] The drama of human salvation is still the topic to hand.

What happens when we move into Claudel's third epoch, dubbed the 'idealist'? The label Claudel thus attaches to Baroque and Neo-classical art might suggest a draining away of Christian substance in favour of an alien, or at best derivative, metaphysic: after St Thomas, Hegel, or at least Descartes. But this is not really his view. The third epoch of Christian art is dominated by 'apologetics and mysticism' in an age where prayer is itself 'oratory'. Where possible, thanks to the Counter-Reformation's appeal to all the media of persuasion, eloquence was accompanied by an increasingly sumptuous polyphonic music. In terms of verbal art:

> the sermons of the epoch are like mounted jewels where pure gold has the suppleness of pastry or confectionery and the Scriptural citations are elegantly inserted into beautiful Latin garlands as into a cartouche.[12]

The style may be high in artifice, but is the content un-Christian? Claudel does not say so, and his admiration for Bossuet suggests the contrary.[13] Still, he is not enthused by the Baroque interior considered as liturgical space. The Baroque church is suited not so much to the *opus Dei*, the corporate cultic act *vis-à-vis* God, as it is to an 'incense-saturated opera performance'.[14] Claudel paints a picture of a 'room with clear lines where, at the foot of pulpit and cross, the faithful people comes to receive catechism lessons', a 'riding school where devotion is periodically exercised in the gymnastic mode, instructions called out in ringing tones by a tireless monitor'.[15] Claudel does not care for the way that, typically, the sanctuary is cut down in size, while a cascade of steps to ground level marks the distance from the place of the public. The images that evoke the events and truths of faith are now portable images, hooked on to the walls at will, and thus no longer belonging *architecturally* to the church room. Claudel had no desire to write off

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 123. A cartouche is a decorative frame, shaped as, inter alia, a garland, shield, or half-opened scroll.

[13] Claudel had the highest respect for Bossuet's prose style. If he had to choose one book to witness to 'what the French language and spirit were' it would be, he once declared, Bossuet's *Histoire des variations des Eglises protestantes*. See 'Bossuet', P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., p. 438.

[14] 'Note sur l'Art chrétien', in ibid., p. 123.

[15] Ibid.

Baroque art as such, for which he had, indeed, huge admiration. His objection was, rather, to the *manner of its orchestration in the church setting*. How far this distinction can be sustained is perhaps a moot point.

For Claudel, it followed, unfortunately, from the need to create a well-informed and disciplined laity (and clergy) in the face of the Protestant revolt that, from the pulpit or under the grille of the confessional, priests were encouraged to hand out individual prayer texts, methods of devotion, schemes of meditation, indulgenced formulas, for all the world like 'medals and stars' in the school-room. Though this was light years away from Claudel's vision of the Liturgy – praising God is one thing, training souls in devotion quite another – he accepts it had *some* good fruits. The angels drew profit from it even if devils made it possible. The effect on visual art, however, was to shift the focus away from allowing God to speak the word of revelation in a building that should be an 'immense apparatus for listening and responding'. Energy went instead to imagining a space that would 'gain hearts' by 'seducing sensibility', while not allowing representation to part too dramatically from the 'general and conventional'.[16]

This is what Claudel understands by 'idealism' in this context. Artist and patron want to give sacred representations the maximal physical, moral, and spiritual attractiveness but, since it is not *God in his self-revelation* who is uppermost in their minds, this 'maximum' turned out not to be enough. Claudel gives us part of his explanation of the origins of *kitsch*, sugary sentimentality in Church art, when he says that 'from Raphael and Murillo to the modern Catholic repositories in Paris's Place Saint-Sulpice, there winds a road that is paved with good intentions'.[17]

The Problem of 'Kitsch'

His fullest account of the origins of *kitsch* comes, however, in two slighter essays, 'Le goût du Fade',[18] and 'Lettre à Alexandre Cingria sur les causes de la decadence de l'Art sacré'.[19] For the former piece, further explanations are: the industrialisation of art (i.e., mass production aimed at 'average taste'); the feminisation of Christianity with the decline of male practice; the low cultural level of the clergy despite their daily exposure to the 'boldest poetry' in the psalms and prophetic books. Claudel notes, however, the valiant contrary efforts of Benedictines, Dominicans, Jesuits, all three of which he accounts Orders 'less enslaved to current tastes'.[20] The other piece took the form of an open letter to

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[16] Ibid., pp. 124–125.

[17] The problem of kitsch is helpfully addressed in R. Egenter, *The Decadence of Christ* (ET London: Burns and Oates, 1967).

[18] 'Le goût du Fade', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., pp. 113–117.

[19] 'Lettre à Alexandre Cingria sur les causes de la decadence de l'Art sacré', in ibid., pp. 118–121.

[20] 'Le goût du Fade', in ibid., p. 117.

a Swiss Catholic who was not only mosaicist, painter, and worker in stained glass, but also, encouragingly, the author of an enquiry (dated 1917) into the current decadence of Christian art.[21] Along with the goldsmith Marcel Feuillat and the sculptor François Baud, Cingria had founded at Carouge near Geneva a kind of artists' guild, the 'Groupe Saint-Luc et Saint-Maurice'. An English reader may (rightly) be put in mind of the 'Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic' founded by Hilary Pepler and Eric Gill at Ditchling in Sussex in the years 1919 to 1921.[22] The leaders of Cingria's fraternity elaborated a philosophy of Christian art under the guidance of the abbé Charles Journet (and hence, indirectly, of Jacques Maritain whose *Art et Scolastique*, a crucial inspiration for the Ditchling community, appeared in 1920).[23] And they turned Carouge into a centre for the studios of artists and craftsmen with a wide influence in *la Suisse romande*.[24] In his letter to Cingria, Claudel states in frank terms the consequence of the 'taste for the insipid': modern churches, in their form and content, show forth the 'ugliness' of 'all our sins and faults'.[25] He was in evident agreement with the diagnosis carried out by the Dominicans of the journal *L'Art sacré* – which is not necessarily to say he would have commended all of their prescriptions, which sometimes had the effect of replacing insipidity by brutalism, and hence the contrary of beauty in another mode.[26]

In an appendix to the 'Note on Christian Art', Claudel adds that the characteristic nineteenth century church too, with its myriad notices addressing a now more widely literate laity, often seemed kitted out mainly for rites of passage: christenings, marriages, funerals. In France at least – one would have to say that the effect of the Tractarian and Latin Catholic revivals in England was far otherwise – it gave an impression of bureaucratic Erastianism, or what

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[21] A. Cingria, *La decadence de l'Art sacré* (Lausanne: Cahiers vaudois, 1917). On this figure, see J.-B. Bouvier, *Alexandre Cingria, peintre, mosaïste, et verrier* (Geneva, Editions du Mont-Blanc, 1944).

[22] Of the many accounts, I recommend E. Clayton, 'David Jones and the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic', in D. Shield (ed.), *David Jones in Ditchling, 1921–1924* (Ditchling: Ditchling Museum, 2003), pp. 17–32.

[23] A. Nichols, O. P., 'The English Uses of Maritain's Aesthetics', in idem., *Redeeming Beauty. Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 125–142.

[24] P. Rudaz, *Carouge, foyer d'art sacré* (Carouge: Editions Ville de Carouge, 1998). Journet's eulogy of Cingria, 'En mémoire Alexandre Cingria', published in the theologian's journal, *Nova et vetera*, in the year of his death, 1945, cites Claudel's testimony to his person and work.

[25] 'Lettre à Alexandre Cingria sur les causes de la decadence de l'Art sacré', art. cit., p. 120.

[26] For the Dominican contribution, see A. Nichols, O. P., 'The French Dominicans and the Journal L'Art sacré', in idem., *Redeeming Beauty*, op. cit., pp. 105–123; for the baleful impact of International Modernism on church architecture, see M. Doorly, *No Place for God. The Denial of the Transcendent in Modern Church Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), pp. 35–96.

Claudel calls the stamp of a 'caractère Concordataire'.[27] Napoleon I's conclusion of a Concordat with Rome, observed by subsequent French governments, despite changes of regime, until 1905, had been intended to provide Frenchmen with the basic facilities of religion while depriving the Church of an independence of action which might have proved all too successful – though in point of fact the century of the Concordat was a notable one for French missionary activity and French monasticism, both crucial indicators of ecclesial health.

Dionysian Therapy

For art therapy, applied to a Church in some danger of *embourgeoisement*, at any rate in ordinary parish life, Claudel turns to the treatises of the sixth century Syrian monk-theologian who wrote under the name of 'Denys the Areopagite'. In *On the Celestial Hierarchy* Denys argues that God and the spiritual creatures closest to him (the angels) are better imaged – or, by implication, depicted – on the basis of 'unlike things', as in the often humble metaphors of the Bible. Exalted metaphors might be falsely taken as adequate.[28] Owing to the asymmetrical relation of our world to the heavenly, in divine matters negations are true, affirmations incongruous. Applying Denys's teaching, Claudel suggests that to paint the Word made flesh using the figures of lamb, lion, or fish (all found in Scripture, or in early Christian art) is a lot less dishonourable than to make a Jesus who is pretty-pretty or Hollywood-handsome. Christ does not need some artistic version of the 'derisory purple cloak' Pilate put around his shoulders at the Passion. 'It was in opening his heart for us on Calvary that he sought to explain to us what made his face shine on Thabor.'[29]

Probably Claudel is engaged in defence of his own practice in literary art too when he excoriates 'narrow Jansen-isers' and 'peevish censors' for taking scandal at the audacious familiarity with the sacred when the contemporary visual artist presses into its service an unusual vocabulary of creaturely forms. Has not the inspired author of Genesis declared all such forms 'very good'? Claudel looks for support to the doctrine, at once aesthetic, cosmological, and theological, he had worked out for himself in his treatise *Art poétique* as well as the example of poetic art he had created in his earliest substantial poems, *Cinq grandes Odes*. 'It is not a question of giving

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[27] 'Note sur l'Art chrétien', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., p. 132.

[28] Compare *On the Celestial Hierarchy* II. 3: 'It was to avoid this kind of misunderstanding that the pious theologians so wisely and upliftingly stooped to incongruous dissimilarities for by doing this they took account of our inherent tendency toward the material and our willingness to be lazily satisfied by base images': C. Luibheid and P. Rorem (eds), *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1987), p. 150.

[29] 'Note sur l'Art chrétien', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, p. 126.

nature a hair-do and pomade, but of setting it on fire.'[30] The sacred artist does not seek to improve nature but to 'explain why nature was made'. To this end, he or she will profit by each creature's 'essential difference' (here Claudel equates his own concept of 'difference' in *Art poétique* with Denys's notion of 'dissimilitude'), excluding nothing but 'reuniting everything'. He or she will make 'use of the whole vocabulary [of creation] which is placed at our disposal' by God.[31] Claudel is confident that a real rebirth of sacred iconography will come from this attitude since it exemplifies the Gospel imperative 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well' (Matthew 6: 33).

At this point in the making of his case, Claudel registers a doubt. 'How many of these soldiers of Christ which their mothers made with flesh and blood, grace with fire, and the Rue Bonaparte with butter' have inspired and consoled, occasioned repentance, witnessed sacrifice? A modern martyr missionary (Claudel was aware of some in China) may embrace a statue of the Sacred Heart 'of which the best that can be said is one wouldn't have it in one's drawing room.'[32] Should he not, then, apply the Dionysian theological aesthetic by saying, however paradoxical it might sound, that the 'nameless ignominy' of the plaster statues of the art of Saint-Sulpice serves well enough the 'incommunicable Beauty' of God? The castor-oil plant is not exactly magnificent, not the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but it served to 'protect the bald pate of the prophet Jonah and to purge this bitter man of his anger against poor Nineveh!'.[33] The trouble is, a professional artist (such as Claudel himself) has a hard time accepting this sophisticated argument for philistinism. 'He is indignant, desolate, to see all creation today disinherited of the word of recognition and love it owes its Creator.'[34] Surely the Church can still make some novel use of men with 'plaster dust in their hair and paint covering their fingers'?[35]

A Resolution

So Claudel comes to his resolution. It turns on a Claudelian maxim, 'The City of the soul is built from above'. When an artist seeks 'not to appear but to *respond*', his act is a 'work of glory' that answers the Creator by creation, and in so doing prompts 'all kinds of constructive consequences and propositions'.[36] It has a ripple effect in the pool of life. Note that this concept presumes the primacy of the divine word. The soul's 'City' is 'built from above' not only because it needs genuinely

30 Ibid., p. 127.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., p. 128.
33 Ibid. The reference is to Jonah 4: 6–11.
34 'Note sur l'Art chrétien', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., p. 129.
35 Ibid., p. 130.
36 Ibid.

theological artists to help construct it but – even more primordially – because those artists themselves need the stimulus of the word of God, however expressed. The word may be expressed in, for instance, the life of a great saint. 'St Francis on flame brings Giotto out of his bucket of plaster and Giotto draws behind him the whole of Italian art.'[37] 'Exchanges', both spiritual and material, fashion the city, and Claudel can appeal to the book of Sirach for the claim that without craftsmen it will not be built.[38] He does not expect them necessarily to be devout. As Jesus ben Sirach remarks, 'Their prayer is in the practice of their trade'.[39] Claudel comments, 'The Kingdom of heaven they seek in its horizontal meaning, let us hope it will not be refused to them in the other [meaning], which is the better one.'[40]

Meanwhile (since, evidently, such eruptions cannot be planned), Claudel has some simple prescriptions for builders. His departure point is the church as *domus orationis*, a 'house of prayer'.[41] Since the need to pray is of all our needs 'the most hidden, the more ineffective, the least required by the will, the least solicited by circumstances, and consequently, the least exposed to finding its own expression', it is imperative that architects, designers and parish clergy give this dimension the primacy in the making or conserving of a church.[42] Inner silence is so hard to obtain that outer silence must be carefully catered for. Claudel does not scruple to making simple suggestions about oiling doors and inserting non-echoing floor coverings, and he has some sensible things to say about how traditional monastic choir-stalls so support the body that one forgets about posture, unlike the ghastly conventional prie-Dieu. For preference a church would be approached like temples Claudel had seen in China and Japan, by crossing an inter-mediate space or along special paths, what he terms 'managed transitions', one example of which in the Judaeo-Christian tradition was the graduated approach in the Jerusalem Temple to the holy of holies.[43] Unfortunately most townscapes make this impossible, but a possible substitute is the deliberate use of reduced light to insinuate the passage from profane to sacred space. Notre Dame de Paris, scene of his first conversion, was, he recalled, 'a bath of benevolent darkness'.[44] Such 'obscurity' makes us feel less far from

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37 Ibid., pp. 130–131.

38 Sirach 38: 27, 29–34.

39 Sirach 38: 34.

40 'Note sur l'art chrétien' in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., p. 131.

41 With a reference to Matthew 21: 13, and parallels.

42 'Appendice. L'église maison de prière', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., at p. 132.

43 Ibid., p. 135. For Claudel's thoughts on the church building in its cosmic context, see the essay 'Développement de l'église', the third 'treatise' in his study *Art poétique*, in *Oeuvre poétique* (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1967), pp. 208–217, and the comments thereon in A. Nichols, O. P., *The Poet as Believer*, op. cit., pp. 60–65.

44 'Appendice. L'église maison de prière', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., p. 136.

the Invisible. It is 'by means of night that we must learn to inhabit light'.[45] The message of a church for Claudel should be 'The light shines in the darkness', a phrase from the Johannine Prologue which for him can cover creation as well as Incarnation.[46] He envisages the 'light' in question concentrated in colour. In this tenebrous ambience, sheer colour on pillars and walls, in media such as glass, ceramic, lacquer (here Claudel lets his imagination run riot in suggesting shades and their combinations), will be, in a run of metaphors from a range of intense experience, 'an encounter of a betrothed pair, the furnace of passion, the cry of sacrifice, a *salle d'étude*, communion with the dawn'.[47] A few years after promulgating his manifesto of sacred art, Claudel produced a eulogy of the windows of the mediaeval French cathedrals – a 'genial and, so far as one can tell, sudden transposition of Byzantine mosaic' – which aims to overpower the reader by its evocation of sheer colour in glass.

> We are buried with Christ in the depths of this pacific abyss, we dwell in silence in the midst of this marvellous liquidity, we breathe these mysteries.[48]

Claudel does not want to be taken for an Iconoclast. That is a genuine danger when abstract art is given primacy in church décor. And so the essay just cited on stained glass stresses not only pure colour but also the figural content of, for instance, the windows of Chartres.[49] Claudel presupposes a Latin church lay-out of the kind familiar since the Catholic Reformation, with crucifix and central tabernacle predominant, though flanked by a statue or two-dimensional image of the Mother of the Lord (and, somewhat less conventionally, if also in conformity to early twentieth century Western piety, St Joseph). But he wants these side figures to be discreet, and perhaps, in the Marian case, changed according to the liturgical season. Likewise, images of the saints should help one to pray in church by appearing there as aids to presence, not as foci for distractions.[50]

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45 Ibid., p. 137.

46 John 1: 5a.

47 Appendice. L'église maison de prière', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., p. 138.

48 'Vitraux des cathédrales de France, XIIe et XIIIe siècles', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., pp. 323–336, and here at p. 326.

49 Ibid., p. 331.

50 See 'Appendice. L'église maison de prière', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres en prose*, op. cit., pp. 139–141.

Conclusion

Claudel offers a mysteric view of the church-building, with a mystagogical appreciation of the role of the sacred image to match.[51] Though deeply rooted in the Latin tradition, his approach has evident elective affinities with that of the best theory (and practice) of Orthodoxy. His critique of *kitsch* is as passionately worded as any Orthodox excoriation of the decadent iconography (by mediaeval criteria, themselves theologically legitimated) of eighteenth and nineteenth century Russian art. At the same time, we are re-assured: he was never tempted by the aniconic Modernist functionalism which, in so many Western Catholic churches, from the 1920s onwards, became the fashionable alternative to the over-crowded boudoir where the 'art of Saint-Sulpice' (and its equivalents in other countries) took the sacred Liturgy a prisoner.

[51] In his study of the Van Eyck polytych, 'The Adoration of the Lamb', at Ghent, he complains that the doors of this 'enormous miniature' are kept open by its custodians as if it were a museum piece, whereas 'it is not just a question here of a work of art, it is a matter of a mystery, of a religious proposal which shouldn't be handed over without solemnity to contemplation by not only eye but soul': thus 'L'Agneau mystique', in P. Claudel, *Oeuvres de prose*, op. cit., p. 245.

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Chapter 7
A Theological Perspective on Church Music

Introduction: Music and Morals

Human beings not only have eyes. They also have ears which respond to beauty, *id quod placet*. How should such delight be evaluated, not least in the context of the setting of the rites? Is music, including liturgical music, adequately treated when it is left as simply a matter of 'taste', of individual response to what pleases? Or should it be considered in its possible moral effects – how it may alter people's moods, attitudes, sensibility, and even their whole view of life? If music can have consequences of that kind, it will inevitably have implications for their behaviour, for what we call ethics. The situation of liturgical music is a special example of this issue. Will not liturgical music have an effect on the ethos of those celebrating the Liturgy, and assisting at it? And if what is chiefly in mind is not ethics in general but the ethos of the Liturgy in particular shall we not need to invoke theology – a theological perspective – if we are to begin to master the issues involved? The ethos of the Liturgy – the spiritual, including moral, demands it puts upon us in and through its celebration – would seem to be something eminently worthy of theological treatment: that is, of a reflective Christian discernment.

The following citation may seem hyperbolic, but it does have the merit of raising the first of these important questions: music and morals. In Cyril Scott's *Music. Its Secret Influence throughout the Ages* we read:

> After the dissemination of Jazz, which was definitely 'put through' by the Dark Forces, a very marked decline in sexual morals became noticeable. Whereas at one time women were content with decorous flirtations, a vast number of them are now preoccupied with the search for erotic adventures, and have thus turned sexual passion into a species of hobby. Now it is just this over-emphasis of the sex-nature, this wrong attitude toward it, for which Jazz-music has been responsible. The orgiastic element of its syncopated rhythm, entirely divorced from any more exalted musical content, produced a hyper-excitement of the nerves and loosened the powers of self-control. It gave rise to a false exhilaration, a fictitious endurance, an insatiability resulting in deleterious moral and physical reactions. Whereas the old-fashioned melodious dance-music inspired the gentler sentiments, Jazz, with its array of harsh, ear-splitting

> percussion-instruments, inflamed, intoxicated and brutalized, thus causing a setback for man's nature towards the instincts of his racial childhood.[1]

Whatever we make of Scott's observations on jazz in particular – and a parallel claim (music specifically composed to encourage an orgiastic state of arousal) was made about rock thirty years later in Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*),[2] Scott represents a form of thinking which is as long-enduring as the Western cultural tradition itself, persistent enough to join Plato with Joseph Ratzinger. Here are hands across two and a half millennia, spanning the entire history of Western music, from Athens to Regensburg.

One difficulty in interpreting this tradition is that among the ancient Greeks, when thinking about music began, the word *musikê* included speech as well as rhythm and melody. In our modern terms, it was music synthesised with poetry. In the *Republic* Plato says that such *musikê* is not so much intended for pleasure or entertainment as to produce a well-balanced order in the human soul and in the *polis*, the civil community.[3] Music is extremely efficacious, he thinks, in this regard because it sinks into the depths of the soul and stays there. In his later work *The Laws* he calls it medicine for the soul's ills, and warns that pleasure and entertainment are no substitutes for truth and symmetry.[4] Some light is thrown on this statement when we read in another of his treatises, the *Timaeos*, the best known of his works in the Western Middle Ages, that music and philosophy imitate divine harmony.[5] Plato's Christian disciple Augustine considers music – or at any rate the sort of music the *Timaeos* has in view – to constitute a sort of working principle of culture by reference to which we can know through analogy the harmony of God's government of things.[6] Plato was not a theist in any sense a biblical Christian could recognise, but in his dialogue *The Symposium* he wants future rulers to study music as youths and then move on to prefer the higher music of philosophy, since discovering the beautiful in music prepares one to discover the beauty of moral and rational order which is the god-like aspect of the real.[7]

In Aristotle, the other principal sage at the origins of what Christian Scholasticism would call the 'perennial philosophy', the fusion of rhythm and melody with speech in poetry seems no longer to be taken for granted. Surprisingly, from our modern standpoint, much of what Aristotle has to say about music is

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[1] C. Scott, *Music. Its Secret Influence throughout the Ages* (London: Rider, 1958), pp. 152–153.

[2] A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York; Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 74.

[3] Plato, *Republic* VII 522a.

[4] Cf. idem., *Laws* 791.

[5] Cf. idem., *Timaeos* 47c–d.

[6] For discussion of Plato's short text, the *De musica*, see R. R. La Croix (ed.), *Augustine on Music. A Series of Interdisciplinary Essays* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

[7] Plato, *Republic* 400c–403c.

found in his *Politics*, but the explanation for that lies in the Platonist background: in the good city morals and education are identical, and music fits in there. Though Aristotle is willing, unlike Plato, to provide space for a music whose role in life is recreational, for relaxation, he is much more concerned with its role as educative and purifying. Aristotle holds in fact that music constitutes a *mimesis*, 'imitation', of the virtues. As he puts it:

> Rhythm and melody supply imitations of anger and gentleness and also of courage and temperance, and of all the qualities contrary to these, and of the other qualities of character, which hardly fall short of the actual affections, as we know from our own experience, for in listening to such strains our souls undergo a change.[8]

And he goes on:

> There seems to be in us an affinity to musical modes and rhythms, which make some philosophers say that the soul is a tuning, others that it possesses tuning.[9]

The American Dominican Basil Cole takes Aristotle to be saying that

> Character and moral growth are aided by the delight one finds in music, so that delight serves a kind of practical middle term between 'musical' values and 'moral' formation.[10]

These Hellenic ideas were taken further in the German Enlightenment. The term 'aesthetic' first comes into use in eighteenth century Germany to denote how a person should be moved by the 'fine arts', itself a term first used in eighteenth century France – *les beaux arts*. For the central figure of Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller, in his influential *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), aesthetic practices should amount to an education, a right formation of sensibility, harmonising the sensuous and rational sides of human nature and in this way promoting moral volition.[11] As we come to delight in the nobility of

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[8] Aristotle, *Politics*, VIII. v. 18 (1340a 19–23).

[9] Ibid., VIII. v. 25 (1340b 18–20).

[10] B. Cole, O. P., *Music and Morals. A Theological Appraisal of the Moral and Psychological Effects of Music* (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1993), p. 39.

[11] P. T. Murray, *The Development of German Aesthetic Theory from Kant to Schiller: A Philosophical Commentary on Schiller's Aesthetic Education of Man* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1994), where references to music are, however, relatively few compared with those to the visual and literary arts; see, though, P. le Huray and J. Day, *Music and Aesthetics in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), for the wider picture. The thesis of J. H. Donelan, *Poetry and Romantic Musical Aesthetic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), is that this holistic moral view

sensuous forms, whether seen or heard, we shall gradually discover the deeper nobility which is of the spirit. Art will humanise us in the highest natural sense.

Theologically considered, the topic of this – Greek and German – conversation is the order of creation. More specifically, where music is concerned, this means the *voices* of creation, since musical sound is of course an extension of sound in general – the aural – precisely as produced by the human creature. They are talking about the implications for the human ethos at large of the way musicians, whether composers or players, pattern and use such sound.

It is easy, surely, to give this an ecclesial 'spin' which will bring it into the sphere of the order of redemption, and so the more-than-natural, the supernatural. If what the philosophers of (Greece and) Germany have to say is true of music in regard to human nobility, it is even more so of the nobility that attaches to the *mirabilia Dei*: the wonders of the divine life shown to us through God's deeds in salvation. There may well be music that prepares one to discover this divine nobility by the sanctification of human powers under grace. Just as the writers I have touched on thought there was music that enhanced (or degraded) at the natural level people who played, sang, or heard it, so there is also, presumably, music that serves (or disserves) the right order of the emotions in their relation to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which proceeds at the supernatural level. In the Platonic Academy the naturally Christian soul of the pagan philosopher Plotinus had already observed that music's ulterior purpose is to bear the listener beyond nature, to the highest beauty, whereby the soul, 'being beautified, becomes like God'.[12]

Theologians generally speak of sanctification as taking place in two phases, or taking effect in two dimensions. Sanctification entails healing what is wounded or damaged in human life, *gratia sanans* (to that one can compare what Plato says about music as medicine for life's ills). Sanctification also entails the elevation of human life, *gratia elevans*, its divinisation, its communion in Jesus Christ with the triune God. In this second respect, the language of Plato's disciple Plotinus is far from unintelligible in our Catholic (and Orthodox) context. Music should assist our deification.

Formation, and Not Just Expression

One rather more pedestrian way of putting this is to say that music is about formation, and not just expression. In a sense the Church has struggled with this problem for centuries. Robert Hayburn's *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*

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gave way to a more restricted or at any rate idealist one: music as the ideal representation of autonomously creative human mind. The spell cast by such an account no doubt plays its part in certain problems of contemporary music, not least in church, as explored by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in the writings on music discussed in the latter part of the present essay.

[12] Plotinus, *Enneads* I. 6. 6.

claims to cover the period from the year 95 to 1977.[13] If such a collection of texts has a common theme, so one twenty-first century Catholic musicologist maintains, it is the effort to 'balance the need for contemporary musical expression with the responsibility of using music that will truly "sanctify the faithful"'.[14] It is not enough that music, and above all church music, should express what we feel we are. It is equally important that such music have the 'ability to shape us into something beyond our present state'.[15] In the liturgical context that will mean above all music that can enhance the formative power already represented by the celebration of the sacred mysteries.

The year 95 ad may strike the reader as distinctly early for papal legislation on any topic, never mind church music. The date turns out to refer to the First Letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, where there are remarks about the singing of psalms and hymns. Hayburn's other date, 1977, marks not only the time of writing but what he considers a nadir in the history of the subject. (He writes of 'the artistic sacrifice that has needlessly been made'.) The contemporary Scottish composer James MacMillan is hardly less cutting:

> Growing up in the 1960s and 70s I was aware of a creeping separation between my serious engagement with music, the application and practice of assiduously honed skills, and what the Church seemed to need and want for the Liturgy.[16]

In the United States, this was erected into a wall of separation: 'ritual music': good; 'art music': bad. That is clearly a topic in need of re-visiting.

Meanwhile we can note the pertinence to the role of music in the formation of Christian selfhood[17] of what remains the most impressive intervention of the magisterium in this field, Pius X's 1903 *motu proprio* usually known by its Italian title, *Tra le sollicitudini*. There Pope Pius made the claim that since sacred music is an integral part of the Liturgy its aim must be congruent with that of the Liturgy itself. And if we ask what that aim might be, the answer we get is that, after the primordial objective, which is doxological, giving glory to God (and that too is a topic which merits re-visit), the objective we are seeking in the Liturgy, and thus in sacred music, is, in Pius's words, 'the sanctification and edification of the faithful'. The 'chief duty' of church music is, he goes on:

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[13] R. F. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music, 95 A. D. to 1977 A. D.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979).

[14] E. A. Schaefer, 'The Expressive and Formative Roles of Music: A Search for Balance in Liturgical Reform', *Antiphon* 7. 2 (2002), p. 21.

[15] Ibid., p. 22.

[16] J. MacMillan, 'Bad music is destroying the Church', *Catholic Herald* for 20 October 2006, p. 8.

[17] The role of the Liturgy in the making of distinctively Christian selfhood is well brought out in L. P. Hemming, *Worship as a Revelation. The Past, Present and Future of Catholic Liturgy* (London: Continuum, 2008).

> to clothe the liturgical text, which is presented to the understanding of the faithful, with suitable melody; its object is to make the text more efficacious, so that the faithful through this means may be more roused to devotion, and better disposed to gather to themselves the fruits of grace which come from the celebration of the sacred mysteries.[18]

It is a passage that echoes the message of the 1562 session of the Council of Trent on the same subject. While the chant is for that Council the best exemplification of a theologically astute musical tradition in the Latin church, nevertheless the bishops at Trent were not minded to ban the use of contemporary harmonised music alongside the Gregorian materials. Whatever one makes of the historicity of the claim that at a meeting in the residence of a Roman cardinal some three years later, in 1565, the music of Palestrina was identified as the model for a polyphony cognate with the Council's aims,[19] the Tridentine reformers certainly sought to guide the selection of contemporary music toward a musical repertoire whose contents would be at least as formative as they were expressive. Edward Schaefer, professor of music at Gonzaga University, Spokane, thinks that in the wake of the Council Palestrina rose to pre-eminence as *the* Catholic master of liturgical polyphony for this very reason, along with the subsidiary considerations that his music:

> has a sense of reserve about it that is appropriately non-worldly for the liturgy [and] … a sense of élan that is organically related to that of chant.[20]

Something like those criteria were doubtless in mind when what is (so far) the last papal encyclical on sacred music, Pius XII's 1955 *Musicae sacrae disciplina*, accorded a subsidiary role in the Liturgy to 'popular religious songs' in the event of their meeting several conditions, among which figured 'a religious dignity and seriousness'.[21] Both the encyclical and the subsequent 'Instruction on Sacred Music and Liturgy', one of the last documents authorised by the pope before his death in September 1958, had in mind vernacular songs of some antiquity – products,

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[18] Pius X, *Tra le sollicitudini*, 1.

[19] The (somewhat over-interpreted) source is cited in L. Bianchi, *Palestrina nella vita, nelle opere, nel suo tempo* (Palestrina: Fondazione Giovanni Pierluigi della Palestrina, 1995), pp. 92–93.

[20] E. A. Schaefer, 'The Expressive and Formative Roles of Music', art. cit., p. 25. For Palestrina's later influence, see W. Kirsch, *Das Palestrina-Bild und die Idee der 'wahren Kirchenmusik' im Schrifttum von ca. 1750 bis um 1900: eine kommentierte Dokumentation* (Kassel: Bosse, 1999).

[21] Pius XII, *Musicae sacrae disciplina in Acta Apostolicae sedis 48* (1956), pp. 13–48, and here at para. 63.

then, of a continuous folk tradition – in use at the Liturgy by immemorial custom.[22] A door was opened, however, to modern sacred music should it meet the overall pattern of demands set out in *Musicae sacrae disciplina*, the inspiration of which derives ultimately from *Tra le sollecitudini*, as its opening paragraphs confess.[23] That commonality of inspiration meant not only a reiterated insistence on the formative role of music (bringing 'spiritual fruit and advantage to the Christian people'),[24] but also, by way of more specific example, a continuing emphasis on the primacy of the chant.

A Concrete Example: Delalande's Theological Perspective on the Chant

One of the least attended-to elements in the Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Liturgy was its acknowledgement of, as the Constitution has it, 'Gregorian chant as proper to the Roman liturgy', and thereby having pride of place in liturgical music.[25] Just ten years before the Council opened, an excellent theology of the chant was provided by a French Dominican, Dominique Delalande, who contributed it to the best of the pre-Conciliar manuals of theology, the four volume *Initiation théologique* published in 1952.[26] His essay is not as well-known as it should be.

Delalande calls the chant a 'given', which theologians must integrate with their work. The structure and ethos of the Church's official prayer – the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours – cannot be fully grasped, he writes, without reference to the music that accompanies it. In the case of the Roman Liturgy, that music is Gregorian chant, though, as he explains, the Eastern liturgies possess some analogue of Western plainchant – a monodic music, archaic, pure, with a solemn, sacral character, a consecrated music whose origins are lost in immemorial time, but existing, it may be, alongside a more developed or a more popular music, sometimes of questionable value.

Delalande emphasises the multiple sources of the chant – Jewish, Syrian, Hellenic – as well as the anonymity with which composers of genius re-worked its

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[22] Ibid., para. 47; Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Instructio de Musica Sacra et Sacra Liturgia in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 50* (1958), pp. 630–663, edited and translated by J. B. O'Connell as *Instruction on Sacred Music and Liturgy* (London: Burns and Oates, 1959), para. 53.

[23] Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Instructio de Musica Sacra et Sacra Liturgia*, op. cit., para. 50; Pius XII, *Musicae sacrae disciplina*, op. cit., para. 3.

[24] Ibid., para. 63.

[25] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, para. 116.

[26] D. Delalande, O. P., 'Le Chant grégorien', in *Initiation théologique, I. Les Sources de la théologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1952), pp. 236–261.

materials at various stages of its long history.[27] Delalande calls this a providential anonymity, which enables us to say the more readily: this music comes from the Church as Bride of Christ, assisted by his Spirit.[28] (A further sign of Providence's interest in the chant, in Delalande's eyes, was the way a movement to restore it to its early purity gathered momentum just at the time – the late nineteenth century – when the repertoire of this music seemed in danger of disappearing from Church practice altogether, edged out by competitors.)

Delalande's apologia for the theological value of the chant falls into three sections. The first concerns the chant's quality as a moral educator. The second deals with its status as what he calls 'a pledge of a redeemed world'. The third has to do with the capacity of the chant to actualise, or bring into relief, the theological content of the Liturgy. We can look at each in turn.

The Chant as Moral Educator

In the first place, granted that in principle music has affinities with all the different conditions of human sensibility, different moods, different modalities of human feeling, this is a music that pacifies and purifies sensibility and tends to recollection. Via the biblical text that it accompanies, it may give expression to strong passions like love and hatred, desire and hope, confidence and boldness, weariness or even terror, and yet everything that is passionate, and perhaps anarchically so in these moods, is here overmastered by what Delalande calls 'the immense divine peace'.

That can be expressed in two ways, says the Scholastically trained friar. It can be expressed, first, *actualiter*: that is, at a given moment, when on some occasion one assists at an Office sung to the chant and finds it has power to return us to ourselves and the divine presence within us, thus re-bonding us to the God who is never absent from us but from whom we are all too often absent. It can also be expressed, secondly, *habitualiter*, that is, by repeated, long-term exposure to the effects of the chant. In this way, its spirituality – here Delelande stresses the spare, stripped quality of the chant – will re-educate a person of good will, refining his or her sensibility and giving it new balance. Thus sensibility will come to support the spiritual life, not war against it. And this has a supernatural and not just a natural side to it. The chant disposes us to receive divine influence, the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the very act of sharing in the prayer of the Church at the Liturgy.

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[27] And 'Jewish' here can be regarded as encompassing not only the synagogue worship of the early Christian era but the music of Israel since King David, if there is merit in an extraordinary, but persuasively argued, suggestion that the cantillation signs of the Hebrew text of Scripture can be so reconstructed as to yield a knowledge of the (Levitically guarded and transmitted) worship of the First temple: thus S. Haik-Vantoura, *The Music of the Bible Revealed: The Deciphering of a Millenary Notation* (ET Berkeley, CA: The American Schools of Oriental Research, 1991).

[28] D. Delalande, O. P., 'Le Chant grégorien', art. cit., p. 242.

The Chant as Pledge of a Redeemed World

This brings us to the second theme of Delalande's apologia: the chant is a pledge of a redeemed world. The chant expresses how the Church has entered on a new order of things in Jesus Christ. In Christ there has taken place a 'new creation', a renewal of creation in which the sensuous realm has become once more the servant of spirit, and indeed, more than that, the vehicle of grace.[29] In the order of the Incarnation, sensuous nature has become in principle the carrier of grace. Assumed into the Church's worship, nature – and that includes sonic nature, the nature found in sounds – receives in some fashion the first- fruits of its own redemption.

To enter this new Jerusalem, however, things must die and be raised, they must be re-made to the measure of the risen Christ. Otherwise they will not be in continuity with him. Sounds can find their place in the liturgical life of Christ's mystical Body only by first losing themselves – losing their previous existence, losing what made them an object of interest in their own right, rather than an object of interest because they relate us to Christ. The rule is the same, writes Delalande, for sounds as for human beings. In each case it is a matter of denying oneself, emptying oneself. To be ordered to the supernatural, then, music must lose its natural seductiveness while nonetheless remaining music – that is, remaining beautiful sound.

The chant is such music. It is music in the mode of sacrifice. And sacrifice is not chiefly destruction, it is chiefly consecration. What is disordered is destroyed but the rest is ennobled by being put at the service of God, the God of revelation and salvation. The Church favours the chant because she has confidence that her children can move towards God by means of it.

For Delalande, three principal features of the chant make this possible. He calls them the chant's poverty, the chant's chastity, and the chant's obedience. First of all, there is the chant's *poverty*. The chant lacks instrumental accompaniment; it lacks polyphony, it lacks harmony, it contents itself with the simplest melodic means, having few large intervals. At the hands of mediocre composers, such poverty of means would produce a miserable result. But at the hands of the great anonymous architects of the chant, such poverty of means becomes a way of liberation and spiritualisation – just as in the case of Christ poverty made him freer in the service of his Father.

The chant is also *chaste*. By speaking of the chant's *chastity*, Delalande has in mind its avoidance of all sensuality and sentimentality. Freed from the tyranny of the need to please, the chant rises up light, flexible, spontaneous, and so more musical than ever. He compares it in this respect to a virginal heart pouring itself out in innocent freshness of sensibility with exquisite spontaneity of expression: the kind of statement easier made in French!

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[29] Ibid., p. 246.

The clearest expression of the chant's sacred character attaches, however, to its *obedience* – that is, its acceptance of a servant role *vis-à-vis* the sacred Liturgy. Its willingness to obey the texts and ethos of the Liturgy is what enables the chant to open up for us such broad theological horizons.

The Chant as Actualisation of the Theological Content of the Liturgy

And this brings Delalande to the third and last section in his apologia, the chant as actualisation of the theological content of the Liturgy. Marvellously docile to the liturgical text, the chant is not stifled by such working conditions, but on the contrary draws its inspiration from them. In exchange for what it receives from the sacred texts – whether these be the Bible or other texts handed down as an expression of Tradition – the chant renders the liturgical text more human and increases its intelligibility. It re-presents the meaning of the Liturgy in a manner that makes it, in Delalande's words, more readily assimilated, more vital, more able to conquer our hearts and minds.

By contrast, polyphonic music, on his view, allows the strictly musical aspect to develop too autonomously from the Liturgy, while instrumental music, taken by itself, can at best create an atmosphere of prayer: it cannot actually assist in the contemplative appropriation of key texts. So much for the chant's special theological qualities, as Delalande sees them.

How the Chant Works Best

He also writes more briefly on the conditions – both objective and subjective – that must be met if the chant is to fulfil the high vocation he outlines. *Objectively*, the condition of efficacy of the chant lies in its being fully itself. That means the musical texts must be authentic, and their execution must correspond to its composers' intentions. Thanks to the work of Solesmes in particular, what we have for this purpose is a version that is, no doubt, imperfect, and yet is sufficient for our purposes. With it we can meet this objective condition of the chant's fulfilment of its role.[30] But of course even a perfect text could be mangled by ill-executed performance. So along with the musical text our own effort is needed as well. Delalande recommends careful attention to technique, modesty of expression – this is not grand opera – and what he calls a humble and contemplative submission to all the nuances suggested by the liturgical text and its musical notation.

[30] Delalande, naturally enough, had no inkling of the revisionist history which, in recent years, would seek to devalue the work of Solesmes as a globalising homogenisation of the pre-existent chant traditions, many of which, dependent on the oral transmission of techniques of improvised ornamentation, had struck deep roots in particular localities of the Latin church. See M. Perès and J. Cheyronnaud, *Les Voix du plain-chant* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), pp. 7–21.

What of the corresponding subjective conditions? First, one must be adequately the master of the chant's technique to be free from preoccupation with it. That is necessary if this music is to be an aid to prayer, and transparent to the spiritual content of the texts it sets. Secondly and finally, we must have an attentive, contemplative attitude. The Church is praying, she is singing. We must be docile, teachable. As he writes: 'Let us adopt the habit, in the act of prayer, of not listening to the chant for itself. We are not aesthetes. We are to bring to bear all our receptive attention on the text'.[31]

One of the objections of the contemporary Hungarian musicologist Lázló Dobszay to much post-Vatican II liturgical practice is that the attempt to set the texts – notably the Introit and Communion verse – at the natural level has given way to what he terms 'insertion music' in the form of strophic hymns, or has contented itself with settings that cannot of their nature bring out the full meaning of the Scriptures, as with the gradual psalms, which, after all, could be sung in such a way that the congregation responds to a more nuanced (and therefore complex) version of the text by a simple refrain.[32] It may be that the wider celebration of the *Missa cantata* in the *usus antiquior* mandated by the new motu proprio *Summorum pontificum* will re-awaken a feeling for how the chant has lovingly sought to render vocal the precise texts of the liturgical books, in the interests of not only expressiveness but also formation. Writing about the mediaeval liturgy, of which the Tridentine rite is a somewhat truncated form, St Bernard remarks that the melody should 'make the text fruitful, make it fecund'.[33]

A Theology of Music in the Post-Conciliar Period

If now we ask, what theology of sacred music do we have from the post-Conciliar period to match in quality this particular theology of sacred music from the immediately pre-Conciliar era there is, so far as my knowledge extends, only one candidate, and it comes from the present pontiff. If he is not as focussed as is Delalande, probably because he has in mind a wider variety of musical idioms than just the chant, he also broadens the discussion. And this is needed. Much as I myself love the chant and think it should be returned to favour as the premier liturgical music of the Latin church, it seems to me instructive that Delalande compares the chant to a Religious under vows. The stripped down character of this music goes well with a stripped down life-style. In modern Western societies the lifestyle of most people is far from sensuously austere. The contrast between the chant's severity and the overcharged aural environment in which contemporary

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[31] D. Delalande, O. P., 'Le Chant grégorien', art. cit., p. 259.

[32] L. Dobszay, *The Bugnini-Liturgy and the Reform of the Reform* (Front Royal, VA: Musicae Sacrae, 2003), pp. 114–116.

[33] Cited from Letter 398 by C. Waddell, O. C. S. O., 'Are there Lessons for Today in Twelfth Century Sacred Music?', *Adoremus Bulletin* XII. 8 (2006), p. 5.

people typically live may be for some how the chant makes full impact. But for others the opposite could be the case. Unaccustomed to silence, to aural void, many people will need music with more obvious warmth and richness, and that must mean harmonised music, so as to awaken a liturgical sensibility in so far as musical means can.

Dominique Delalande never became pope, but Joseph Ratzinger did. Before attempting a thumbnail sketch of his theology of music it seems worth mentioning that fact, since Pope Benedict is likely to have – indeed, he is already having – some practical impact, at any rate in the liturgies of St Peter's and, to a degree, in the liturgies he celebrates beyond Italy as well. For example, in Vienna on 9 September 2007 the pope's celebration of the Eucharist included an orchestral Mass by Haydn, and in the period 2006–7 St Peter's witnessed two such occasions, with orchestral Masses by Mozart and the contemporary German composer Wolfgang Seifein. Of course orchestral Masses will never be the standard musical form in Latin-rite parishes, though the present writer, while still a member of the Church of England, recalls attending a Catholic Mass in a Tyrolean village in the early 1960s when a tiny orchestra made up of local players provided a Baroque-style musical setting (Haydn, I imagine) for the sung *Ordinarium Missae*. Yet something is being flagged up by the magnificent if rare musico-liturgical occasions sponsored by the present pope, as likewise in his speech at the blessing of the new organ of the Alte Kapelle in Regensburg on 13 September 2006 when he remarked of 'the manifold possibilities of the organ': they 'in some way remind us of the immensity and the magnificence of God'.[34] This might put us in mind of the rarely cited document *Inter Ecumenici*, the 1964 'Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the second Vatican Council', where the authors write, 'Liturgical ceremonies should be celebrated with the utmost perfection'.[35] Western Catholics of the post-Conciliar era, on the other hand, claim generally to prefer sincerity to craftsmanship, and the awful thing is they have come naturally to assume that sincerity and craftsmanship are *alternative approaches* in the celebration of the Liturgy, thus forgetting the words of George Herbert which unite the two as closely as can be: 'Wherefore with my utmost art / I will sing thee, / And the cream of all my heart / I will bring thee …'.[36]

Writing as Cardinal Ratzinger, Benedict's theology of church music – which presumes, like Trent and Vatican II, a wider repertoire than that of the chant – has both a negative and a positive charge. Negatively, he finds a contradiction between the Church's historic practice and the present-day preference for what he terms a 'utility music', whose usefulness at the Liturgy consists in enabling vocal participation by the people however minimal the artistic standards of the music

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[34] Benedict XVI, 'Gregorian Chant and Choral Polyphony in the Liturgy', *Adoremus Bulletin* XII. 7 (2006), p. 12.

[35] *Inter ecumenici*, 13.

[36] C. A. Patrides (ed.), *The English Poems of George Herbert* (London: Dent, 1974), p. 155.

concerned. Such an interpretation of the aims of the Second Vatican Council has given us, in his words:

> the increasingly grim impoverishment which follows when beauty for its own sake is banished from the Church …[37]

In the incisive style which typified his personal essays of the 1980s and '90s he wrote:

> One shudders at the lacklustre face of the postconciliar Liturgy as it has become, or one is bored with its banality and its lack of artistic standards.[38]

Ratzinger raises more than a question of taste when he adds in this connexion that such utilitarianism will soon percolate into attitudes to the Liturgy itself, to the Church herself, and indeed to the rest of theological reality. He found implicit in this pragmatic and minimalist standpoint a congeries of errors: a functionalism which asks only what works for the man in the market-place, an iconoclasm suspicious of beautiful form as such, a congregationalism which rejects the corporate treasury of *musica sacra* in the name of what appeals to some group here and now, and a Puritanism which fails to recognise the importance of splendour as an intrinsic dimension of the festal. As the founder of the (American) Society for the Sacred Liturgy, Mgr Francis Mannion summed up Ratzinger's thought in this regard:

> Functionalism is intolerant of liturgical music's aspirations to artistic significance. Iconoclasm, fearful of imagery in worship, is theologically inhospitable to the aural imagery of musical art. Congregationalism rejects complexity and received forms in favour of institutional immediacy and the pre-eminence of local creativity. The collapse of the festive and the splendid in the liturgy in favour of the functional clearly takes with it the great tradition of sacred music, replacing it with the 'utility music' that Cardinal Ratzinger criticizes at the outset.[39]

Speaking positively – concerned, that is, with what should be done, rather than what should not be done, the future Pope Benedict takes the starting-point for a Catholic theology of liturgical music to be the affirmation that the Liturgy is an act of God, taking place through the *communio sanctorum* of the Church of all times and places. If that is true, there are, he thinks, immediate implications for sacred music.

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[37] J. Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith. Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy* (ET San Francisco: Ignatius 1986), p. 100.

[38] Ibid.

[39] F. Mannion, '"The 'Musification' of the Word": Cardinal Ratzinger's Theology of Liturgical Music', *Josephinum* 5. 2 (1998), pp. 53–54.

First, if the music of the Liturgy mirrors the Liturgy as divine action mediated by the communion of saints of all ages, then the composer of new sacred music will be primarily receptive rather than creative, or better, will be appropriately creative only because receptive. He or she 'is not primarily fabricator but inspired recipient'.[40] As Ratzinger writes:

> To this extent, reverence, receptivity and the humility that is ready to serve by participating in the great works that have already issued forth necessarily stand at the beginning of great sacred music.[41]

By itself that might only tell us that budding liturgical composers should listen to CDs of the masterworks of the past. But now we come to a second consideration.

Secondly, if liturgical music reproduces the ethos of the Liturgy itself it will have a mysteric character, and this mysteric quality invites the worshipping church to ascend to the One who, as Ratzinger/Benedict puts it, 'dwells amid the praises of the angels'.[42] This cannot be achieved in the realm of sound without allowing a distinctive role to a choir. The hearts of the faithful will sing better if they hear from the mouths of the musically gifted a song that intimates the voices of the angels. That is Benedict's real apologia for the continued place of 'art music' in church.

That connects with a third and final point in his positive presentation of a theology of Church music. *Thirdly*, if, once again, sacred music echoes the Liturgy it will have a cosmic resonance. The Liturgy joins heaven and earth, and for that reason in its musical extension it must, as he writes, 'orchestrate the mystery of Christ with all the voices of creation'. That is why church musicians cannot abandon the doxological role of their craft: the glorification of the God who in creation and redemption has spread his glory over the earth. As Ratzinger concluded his survey of 'Music and Liturgy' in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, which is his concise *Summa* of liturgical theology:

> Today, too, joy in the Lord and contact with his presence in the liturgy has an inexhaustible power of inspiration. The artists who take this task upon themselves need not regard themselves as the rearguard of culture. They are weary of the empty freedom from which they have emerged. Humble submission to what goes before us releases authentic freedom and leads us to the true summit of our vocation as human beings.[43]

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40 Ibid., p. 56.

41 J. Ratzinger, 'Liturgy and Sacred Music', *Communio* 13. 4 (1986), p. 389.

42 Idem., *The Feast of Faith*, op. cit., p. 116.

43 Idem., *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (ET San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), p. 156.

A Conclusion

When the French musicologist Nadia Boulanger was dying she told Leonard Bernstein that she heard music in her head all the time. He asked her whose music in particular it was. She replied, 'One music … with no beginning, no end'. The Cistercian monk Chrysogonus Waddell has picked up this passage in a short study of the contemporary significance of mediaeval music. He makes of it a fitting commentary on Pope Benedict's plea and a suitable conclusion to this essay. He writes:

> The contemporary composer of sacred music in the aftermath of Vatican II has incredible possibilities, but always in continuity with the best of tradition – which, after all, means the past living on in the present, and leading us into the future. Only let our contemporary sacred music be a sharing in that music from above, a music which is one, without beginning, without end.[44]

[44] C. Waddell, 'Are there Lessons for Today in Twelfth Century Sacred Music?', art. cit., p. 6.

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PART 3
Response to the Word

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Chapter 8
Dante's *Commedia* and the Role of Friars

Introduction

Dante's *Commedia* is the supreme example in the Western Canon of literary response to the Word. Any reader of the *Paradiso* will be aware of the connexion between Franciscans, Dominicans, and Dante's great poem. Franciscans and Dominicans should be glad they appear together in this poem. In *The Stones of Venice* John Ruskin ascribed to its author a perfect balance of imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, each operating at their highest pitch. In Dante, so Ruskin opined, the primary function of the imagination – Ruskin defined this as apprehension of ultimate truth – attained 'the most distinct and the most noble development to which it was ever brought in the human mind'.[1]

If so – and we today are less likely to indulge in untroubled superlatives than were the high Victorians, the form in which this achievement is lodged is a strange one. It brings together great encyclopaedic swathes of knowledge, about mythology, philosophy, theology, cosmology, history, and contemporary affairs, and it makes them the content of a dream – or better, in the words of Dante's Scots translator John Sinclair, the content of 'the record of a dream'.[2] When Dante the character is on the verge of what Dante the author presents as his glimpse of the vision of God, the mellifluous doctor, St Bernard tells, him, '[i]l tempo fugge chi t'assonna': 'the time flies that holds thee sleeping'.[3] At the beginning of his story, in *Inferno*, Canto I, when Dante comes to himself in a dark wood, he cannot tell how he came to be there, so full was he of sleep at that moment. And at its end, in *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, as Sinclair fairly remarks, Dante gives the impression of 'searching his memory as for a forgotten dream'.[4] But *what* a dream: none like it has there been since or before, and that is so no matter whether we regard Dante's dream journey as a literary form, what his contemporaries would call *fictio*, an 'invention', or, alternatively, as the evocation of an actual religious experience, what those contemporaries would term

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[1] J. Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, III. iii. 67. W. Anderson, *Dante the Maker* (London: Hutchinson, 1980; 1983), p. 3, to whom I owe this reference, does not make clear, however, that it is in the 'grotesque' mode that, for Ruskin, Dantean imagination reaches this peak. To Ruskin that meant nobility combined with 'jest': the 'perpetual, careless, and not infrequently obscene', *The Stones of Venice* III. iii. 2.

[2] J. D. Sinclair, *Dante. The Divine Comedy. 3. Paradiso* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971 2nd edition [1948]), p. 477.

[3] *Paradiso*, Canto XXXII, line 139.

[4] J. D. Sinclair, *Dante. The Divine Comedy. 3. Paradiso*, op. cit., p. 490.

visio, a 'vision', a moment or moments of mystical illumination vouchsafed to him personally in contemplative prayer.[5] Though, aesthetically, the integration of form and content in the *Commedia* is decisive, the question of the truth of the poem's contents is scarcely determined by what we decide about the mould in which those contents are contained, the poem's form.

The notion that in dreaming some region of the mind is more open to influxes of divinely originated understanding was warranted for Dante by the biblical revelation. Romanticism in its semi-secularised way would revive a version of this concept in an effort to give epistemic validity to the supra-rational, the meta-empirical. It is characteristic of Christian Scholasticism that *its* transcendentalism, unlike that of Romanticism, is without prejudice to the rational and empirical, which, to the contrary, it affirms, each on its own level. But precisely by distinguishing diverse formalities in the grasping of reality, the high mediaeval Scholastics allow for the intervention of different kinds of authority in the practice of knowing – the authority of a scholarly community, the *magistri*; the authority of outstanding individuals who, through refined sympathy, enjoy a connaturality with what they know; the authority of God himself considered as *prima Veritas*, 'First Truth', manifesting itself in creation and revelation. If with them we think of the world as issuing from a source which has foresight for its development in humankind, then all other cognitive authorities can also be thought of as participatory mediations of divine truth, and consequently as authentic – albeit, at the same time, limited, according to their different modes. This notion of 'cognitive authorities' is vital for an understanding of the poem.

A Theological Reading of the *Comedy*

In order to situate the part the *Commedia* gives to Franciscans and Dominicans, it seems desirable to offer first, as concisely as possible, an overview of the whole poem. This will be of use to those who are unfamiliar with it, or have not looked into it for some while. And for those who, by contrast, are highly familiar with it, a theological presentation may be relatively unusual – though scarcely so unusual as it would be with virtually any other work in the Western literary canon.

My Ariadne's thread for following the poem's labyrinthine development is this: on his dream journey through the three parts of the *Comedy*, as Dante the character is handed on by Dante the author from one authority to another, he moves forward to an ever more comprehensive view of reality, an ever more penetrating evaluation of it.

From the start, Dante the author has made plain one of his most fundamental presuppositions, namely that Scripture and pagan history together constitute complementary elements of divine Providence. And that is so even though the biblical

[5] W. Anderson, *Dante the Maker*, op. cit., p. 406.

contribution far exceeds the classical in range and ultimate aim. The idea of an ordering of sources of understanding is, consequently, key to the way the poem unfolds.

Inferno

In the *Commedia* the services Virgil offers the man lost in a dark wood represent the role in human affairs of reason and conscience. In Canto II of the *Inferno*, however, Virgil is already made to show Dante a warrant higher than this, and it comes from a feminine source. *Tre donne*, 'three ladies', mediate hierarchically the divine realm as disclosed by Judaeo-Christian revelation and its continuation in the life of the Church. Virgil's commission comes most immediately from Beatrice, now in heaven, and for Dante the graced woman of his acquaintance *par excellence*. But this commission reaches Beatrice from the Blessed Virgin Mary as primordial hearer of the Word. And it does so by way of St Lucy, whom Dante regarded as his patron saint: perhaps because her name, *lucia*, is synonymous with enlightenment, since it comes from *lux*. That may be the 'light' that is so ready a symbol of intelligibility, the luminous quality of reality which permits it to be understood, and indeed, intellectuality, the light-giving quality of mind which renders that intelligibility actual. Alternatively, Dante may have felt drawn to Lucy on the more straightforward ground that, owing to the terrible blinding which figures in the legend of her martyrdom, she was popularly credited with powers of intercession for those afflicted, as Dante became, with ophthalmic problems. He had trouble with his eyes.

The Mother of the Word incarnate, through Lucy, via Beatrice, has activated Virgil in guiding Dante the character through the world beyond death and in discerning the implications of that world for the establishment of a just order on earth here and now. Virgil, evidently, stands for reason and conscience not as operating autonomously but, rather, reason and conscience mandated to be the vice-gerents of revelation, and only in that fashion enjoying full authority. Put in another way, in Virgil's mission, character-Dante already encounters an antecedent grace which took an initiative, and this is a love issuing from beyond reason though with a view to employing reason, not to overthrowing it.[6]

For author-Dante, the public moralist, that must include, and very importantly include, *practical* reason. And so we see in the Virgil-guided meetings of character-Dante with various sorts of mortal sinner in the *Inferno* the combination of sympathy with unflinching moral realism that is the hallmark of both Dantes, author and character alike: what has been called his 'union of tenderness and severity'.[7] Hell is the self-inflicted moral truncation of human aspiration, and as such it is inevitably a condition of the experienced absence of God. In Hell, time is

[6] Were the co-operation *only* that of Virgil and Beatrice the combination would suggest, rather, earthly felicity: the ideal empire together with the ideal Church.

[7] J. D. Sinclair, *Dante. The Divine Comedy. 1. The Inferno* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971, 2nd edition [1948]), p. 82.

told for Dante from the moon not from the sun, since the sun is 'the visible image of God, not to be named in that place of darkness'.[8] By contrast, but still using the symbolism of astronomy, the *Inferno* will end, like the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*, with the word *stelle*, 'stars':

> [T]he stars mean for Dante all the good that is beyond the world, all the perfect order and the working providence of God, and it is into obedience to that order and assurance of that providence that all his experience and all the leading of Virgil and the memory and the hope of Beatrice are to bring him.[9]

But Virgil cannot take Dante all the way. Though he is sufficiently aligned with the divine ordering of the world to be a serviceable instrument for certain purposes, Virgil's powers of mind and heart have not been Christologically expanded through a faith, hope, and charity based on the fulfilment of human aspiration in the saving Incarnation of the Creator. True, by his own account in *Inferno* Canto XII, he has registered the moment of the Atonement, a moment which modified forever the character of the God–world relationship. But he registers it as experiencing in wonder and bewilderment something that is happening beyond his ken: 'I' pensai che l'universo sentisse amor', 'I thought the universe felt love'.[10]

Purgatorio

As the two climb up Mount Purgatory, then, it can only be over Dante, not Virgil, that angels pronounce the various 'beatitudes' spoken by Christ in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and while so doing efface the marks of sin from his forehead. They thus signify that in the dispensation of New Testament grace no sin is ever merely removed. Rather, it is replaced – replaced by a blessing from out of evangelical resources. At the summit of Mount Purgatory, Virgil hands Dante over, not directly to Beatrice, though this will follow soon, but first of all to the enigmatic 'lady of the woods'.

Whatever historic figure Dante has in mind here, in the theological symbolics of the poem she is the transition from a guide who represents the 'urgings and corrections of conscience' to one who, in a miraculously preserved Garden of Eden, represents something far less laborious: 'free delight in good'.[11]

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[8] Ibid., p. 259.

[9] Ibid., p. 432.

[10] *Inferno*, Canto XII, lines 41–42.

[11] J. D. Sinclair, *Dante. The Divine Comedy. 2. Purgatorio* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971, 2nd edition [1948]), p. 362.

> Lo sommo ben, che solo esso a sè piace,
> fece l'uom buono e a bene, e questo loco
> diede per arra a lui d'etterna pace.
> The Supreme Good who does only His own Pleasure
> made man good and for good and gave him this place
> for earnest of eternal peace …[12]

This point of transit is a reminder of human origins, not out of palaeological interest in early *homo sapiens*, but because for orthodox Christianity the creative act which posited humankind was already saturated with world-transcending purpose. The rational animal was never to domesticate fully to its environment. Something more was intended. Dante describes the lady as no 'less fair than Proserpine in the meadow when Pluto seized her, or Venus when she was pierced by Cupid's dart, and not less to be desired and dared for than she whom Leander desired and dared for across the Hellespont'.[13] These are, of course, pagan comparisons, which Dante draws in order to make the claim that here in the lady is the better reality suggested by these examples of natural human imagination at its highest. The passion with which the soul burns for the redeemed life goes beyond anything found in these stories.

But the moment has come for Dante to pass under the authority of Beatrice: that is, to see further – since he can now access not merely the transition between nature and grace but the realm of grace in its own superordinate fullness in regard to that of nature, and, on the basis of the criteria grace supplies, judge more acutely than ever before. The final scene on Mount Purgatory before Dante bathes in the river of perfected justification – total regeneration, '[la] santissima onda', 'the most holy waters',[14] the completion of baptismal transformation – is his meeting with Beatrice as she arrives on the chariot of the Church.

The chariot scene, with its formal pageantry, is not so easy for modern readers to appreciate. But it is key to much in the cantos that concern the Franciscans and Dominicans in the *Paradiso*, and so requires our particular attention. Unlike Dante and his intended audience, we are unfamiliar with the presentation of allegorical pageantry, whether sacred or secular, on city streets, nor does television coverage of modern warfare include shots of the *carroccio*, the war-chariot carrying the flag which accompanied into the field the forces of an Italian city-state. For in the chariot scene it is the Church militant that he sees, 'not now in its dispersed and suffering members as on the slopes of the mountain, but in its ruling forces …'.[15]

The chariot is drawn by the griffin – a Christological symbol, though not so much symbol of Christ *per se* as of the orthodox dogma of Jesus's single personhood and twofold nature (the upper part of the griffin's body is gold, as

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12 *Purgatorio*, Canto XXVIII, lines 91–93.

13 J. D. Sinclair, *Dante. The Divine Comedy, 2. Purgatorio*, op. cit., p. 374.

14 *Purgatorio*, Canto XXXIII, line 142.

15 J. D. Sinclair, *Dante. The Divine Comedy, 2. Purgatorio*, op. cit., p. 390.

befits its eagle-nature as symbol of divinity; its lower part, its lion-nature, red and white for the vulnerable purity of the humanity assumed). Its wings, we gather, reach up into the sky but its feet are on the earth. This curious float is preceded by seven moving candlesticks, 'trees of gold', *alberi d'oro*,[16] which stand for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to the messianic people, prayed for by the bishop in administering the sacrament of Confirmation, sealing the candidates' membership in the Church. Dante could have assumed his public would have known the list by heart: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge, piety, and the fear of the Lord. Dante describes their light as like streaming pennants, 'tratti pennelli', in all the colours of the prism, 'all those colours of which the sun makes his bow', 'tutte in quei colori onde fa l'arco il Sole'). What they show first of all are twenty-four elders marching. These are the Old Testament hagiographs, the authors of the books of Israel's biblical canon. As Dante paints the scene, the chariot itself is flanked by women, dancing to right and left. These represent the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, and their cardinal counterparts, justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence. Alongside the chariot move figures embodying the symbols of the four evangelists, and behind it come St Paul and St Luke (qua author of the Acts of the Apostles rather than his Gospel), and those who wrote to the Churches in the other Epistles and the Book of Revelation. These last are wreathed in crowns which give their foreheads the appearance of being on fire: evidently, the wreaths are red, the colour of love. The law of love, Dante is saying, is the message of the New Testament overall. Beatrice must be standing in the chariot with her face forwards, because Dante can see the griffin reflected in her eyes. There may be here a concealed reference to the Sacred Host carried in the glass lunette of the monstrance on the feast of Corpus Christi: the chants, lights, and scattered flowers which also figure in the scene suggest as much. But what those interested in friars – specifically Franciscans and Dominicans – need to concentrate on are the chariot's wheels. This chariot, Dante makes clear, is a two-wheeled vehicle, and neither wheel, so it turns out, is entirely reliable. In the *Purgatorio* Dante does not give us much clue as to what the wheels are, but in Canto XII of the *Paradiso* all is made plain: the *Orders of St Dominic and St Francis* are the two wheels of the chariot 'in which Holy Church defended herself and overcame in the field her civil strife', 'in che la Santa Chiesa si difese / e vinse in campo la sua civil briga'.[17] It is in the service of, respectively, knowledge and love, that these wheels allow the chariot to move. Here Dante-author has in mind specifically the spiritual unity of the Church through the love-knowledge that belongs to the revelation whose pageant Dante-character is witnessing in this scene.

And what happens to the chariot? It gets almost totally wrecked. Virgil is not a witness. By now he has gone. There is no way natural reason, even on a special operations exercise, can comprehend what happens next. The chariot has stopped

[16] *Purgatorio*, Canto XXIX, line 43.

[17] *Paradiso*, Canto XII, lines 107–108.

at a great tree which elicits from the participants the murmured cry, *Adamo*: 'Adam!'. It is all humanity in its genealogical tree (the metaphor we still make use of). The tree is leafless, and so if not dead then moribund. Yet no sooner has the chariot – the saving revelation – been attached to it than the tree bursts into foliage and even flower. The tree is the tree of man not in his DNA but in his moral life: or what the late Father Kenelm Foster called man in relation to the 'moral order of the cosmos'.[18] But in an instant the lyricism of the floral, arboreal, is disrupted by violence. Beatrice is sitting by the tree in the moment of unexpected attack by seven beasts, themselves modelled on figures of evil in the Johannine Apocalypse. The moral disasters that have overcome the Church in its history now fill Beatrice with grief and anger. Dante may have it in mind that she sits by the tree in passionate affinity with the divine justice, as the Mother of the Lord once stood in compassionate affinity with the divine mercy by the side of another tree, the wood of the Cross. According to a widespread mediaeval legend, the upright of the Cross was fixed in a plot of earth where Adam's skull lay buried.

This entire *mise-en-scène* is formalistic and artificial to a degree, but seen through the eyes of Dante-character, penitent, illumined, glad, amazed, gazing entranced on his lady who has brought him the reconciling pardon of Christ, it nonetheless glows. Such radiance, however, is only at its beginning: the *Paradiso* awaits us.

Paradiso

As we enter, though, the last book of the trilogy, we need to bear in mind Dante's preoccupation, through the final Cantos of the *Purgatorio*, with the condition of the Church, which is the intended community of redemption, and thus the single human solidarity that carries fully ultimate significance. Dante's dream journey to the heaven of heavens is not a Plotinian flight of the alone to the Alone. On the contrary: as distance from the divine sphere decreases, concern for the graced creation increases in intensity. That is not surprising, since, to repeat a principle suggested at the outset, drawing closer to the source of all illumination, one does not only see further, one also judges more acutely. But this is not merely a matter of grasping more fully and evaluating more cogently. Dante's theological aesthetics save him here from both intellectualism and moralism. For beauty is also increasing and indeed turning into its supernatural counterpart, glory. Dante communicates this by a device entirely his own.

[18] And vice versa: 'the moral order of the cosmos viewed in relation to man'; K. Foster, O. P., *God's Tree. Essays on Dante and Other Matters* (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1957), p. 44.

> [E]ach ascent from height to greater height is marked by the increasing beauty of Beatrice in his eyes: the truth of God, more known, becomes always more glorious.[19]

In the *Paradiso*, Dante's eschatology combines hagiology, Christology and Mariology, with a vision of the divine Trinity. Cantos with hagiology prominent begin with those where we meet St Dominic and St Francis and certain of their followers. The Cantos, specifically X, XI, and XII, will be concerned with the present condition of these Orders and their contribution (or otherwise) to the good of the redeemed community on earth. But they also have the auxiliary function of directing the reader's attention to the heart of eschatology: the vision that is the bliss of all the saints. This bi-focal quality – back to earth, on to the beatific vision – is the hallmark of the *Paradiso*. Nor can we call it schizophrenic if it is human and Christian experience now which will undergo transfiguration in the Age to come.

The Cantos of Dominic and Francis

In Cantos X to XII where the Dominicans and Franciscans predominate, two circles of saints intersect: one of saints distinguished above all by their wisdom, and the other of saints typified by love and service. Such wisdom and love, encapsulated in holy people, are fruitings of the Trinitarian relationships whereby, as Dante explains in the opening stanza of Canto X, the Father, the 'primal and ineffable Power', looks on his Son, his Wisdom and Word, 'with the love which the One and the Other eternally breathe forth': that is, with the Holy Spirit. With the assistance of Beatrice, Dante now 'tastes' this truth, and, in his rapture, for the moment forgets her mediating presence – whereupon she smiles at him with pleasure. At that moment:

> the splendour of her smiling eyes
> broke up the absorption of my mind and set it on many objects.
> … lo splendor delli occhi suoi ridenti
> mia mente unita in più cose divise.[20]

What are these 'more things', 'many objects'? Both he and Beatrice find themselves surrounded by what Dante describes as a corona of lights from which the sound of sweet singing emerges. They are the glorified souls of teachers: in law, the arts, and theology, from King Solomon through Church fathers like Dionysius and Bede to Gratian and Albert the Great. They are named for Dante by Thomas Aquinas, as is commonly underlined by those, surely now a minority, for whom

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19 J. D. Sinclair, *Dante. The Divine Comedy. 3*, op. cit., p. 128.

20 *Paradiso*, Canto X, lines 62–63.

the *Commedia* is, at any rate in the main lines of its metaphysics, ethics, and divinity, Thomism in poetic guise.[21] What Aquinas does in the Canto that follows is not confirm magisterially Dante's world-outlook but launch into the praise of St Francis, with a sting in the tail by way of criticism of the Dominicans for not living up to their complementary ideal.

It is generally supposed that what we have in Dante-Aquinas's summary of the life of St Francis is a version of St Bonaventure's *Legenda maior*, or its shorter companion piece for liturgical reading, the *Legenda minor*. This biography, commissioned by a General Chapter of the Franciscans in 1260, was approved six years later with accompanying legislation decreeing that every friary should have a copy (more than four hundred manuscripts exist) and that all earlier biographies (there were at least three: two by Thomas of Celano and one by Julian of Speyer) should be destroyed. That has seemed suspicious to some scholars who accuse Bonaventure, who became Minister General in 1257, of what recent British governments have taught us to call 'spin'. Bonaventure was certainly worried about a unilateral emphasis on the importance of poverty in Francis's life – the controversy with the so-called Spiritual Franciscans was imminent, and in the *Legenda* there are echoes of Bonaventure's own spiritual theology, notably in the *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, for which poverty is subordinated to other virtues deemed more fundamental: humility and charity.[22] In his life of Francis, Bonaventure explained his hermeneutic innocently enough (and thus, for cynics, unpersuasively): the guiding principle, he tells us, was comprehensiveness of coverage.

If the *Legenda* (in either form) is indeed Dante's source and the ideological view of it is correct, then, the poet, we can say, has restored poverty to its primacy in his reading of Francis's life. If so, it may have been by reference to a little allegorical tract called the *Sacrum Commercium* which appeared shortly after Francis's death. The tract tells of Francis wooing his bride, the Lady Poverty, who finally consented to live with him.[23] This 'Holy Converse of the Blessed Francis

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[21] The classic example is P. Mandonnet, O. P., *Dante le théologien. Introduction à l'intelligence de la vie, des oeuvres et de l'art de Dante Alighieri* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1935), criticised by B. Nardi, *Dal 'Convivio' alla 'Commedia'* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano del Medio Evo, 1960), and idem., *Saggi e note di critica dantesca* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966). A modern revival, in semi-popular form, of Mandonnet's approach is A. D'Amato, *Dante, l'uomo e il profeta* (Bologna: Edizione studio domenicano, 1990). A judicious intermediary position is taken on the philosophical aspect of Dante's writing in E. Gilson, *Dante et la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1939), and in an overview of the whole by K. Foster, O. P., in *The Two Dantes, and Other Studies* (London: Darton, Longman and Rodd, 1977), pp. 56–65.

[22] C. M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 12–13.

[23] H. D. Rawnsley (tr.), *Sacrum Commercium: the Converse of Francis and his Sons with Holy Poverty* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1904). There is a modern critical edition: S. Brufani (ed.), *Sacrum commercium sancti Francisci cum domina Paupoertate* (Assisi: Porziuncola, 1990).

with Lady Poverty' may have influenced Giotto's fresco in the Lower Church at Assisi where Francis and the lady stand together, with Christ behind them joining their hands in matrimony. Francis is putting a ring on the bride's finger.[24] But in point of fact, the lady in question was not *so* marginal in the *Legenda major*. Whatever Bonaventure personally made of this, he transmits intact Francis's response to some friars who asked him privately which virtue was dearest to Jesus Christ: it was poverty, answered Francis, the pre-eminent way of salvation.[25]

Dante's account agrees. Speaking through the mouth of St Thomas (not a canonised saint, incidentally until two years after Dante's death), Dante presents Francis's life as essentially a love-affair with Lady Poverty, who, since the death of Christ – when she mounted the Cross to join Jesus there – had been 'deprived', *privata*, 'despised', *dispetta*, 'obscure', *scura*, 'without a suitor', *sanza invito*, until Francis came along.[26] Thomas/Dante presents the happy and harmonious exchange of looks between Francis and the lady as what so attracted the first members of the Order of Friars Minor: 'the little poor people', *la gente poverella*.[27] And it was from the bosom of his lady that Francis's soul went forth to God: a reference to his last testament and dying wish to be set down on the naked earth. Francis's preaching before the Sultan is really the only episode *un*related to poverty that Thomas/Dante pauses to mention. Even the reception of the stigmata is treated as a seal of the betrothal to the lady, in series with the confirmations of the Order's role in the Church given by the relevant bulls of Innocent III and Honorius III. It is by comparison with this love-affair with poverty that Dante's Thomas proceeds to excoriate his own Order, the Dominicans.

In Canto XII, St Bonaventure returns the compliment through a panegyric on the founder of the Friars Preachers, St Dominic. Dante's Bonaventure presents Dominic not as an ardent lover but a valiant soldier, fighting in the service of the Christian faith, 'gracious to his own and pitiless to enemies', *benigno a' suoi ed a' nemici crudo*.[28] He is a *paladino*, a 'paladin', a champion, a knightly hero.[29] The language of militancy, spiritual warfare, may belong with New Testament discipleship, but at Dante's hands in this Canto, Dominic emerges less as a human figure and more as sheer spiritual force: a 'torrent', says Dante's Bonaventure,

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[24] J. R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order. From its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 279.

[25] M. Robson, O. F. M. Conv., *St Francis of Assisi. The Legend and the Life* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997), p. 276, with reference to chapter 7 of the *Legenda maior*. Bonaventure's *Apologia pauperum* – his contribution to the debate between the Mendicants and the seculars – leaves little doubt that he was convinced of the value of *altissima paupertas* for Christian perfection: thus J. G. Bougerol, *Introduction à saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1988), pp. 272–277.

[26] *Paradiso*, Canto XI, lines 64–66.

[27] Ibid., line 94.

[28] Ibid., Canto XII, line 57.

[29] Ibid., line 141.

'driven from a high spring', its power impacting maximally on the 'heretic thickets', *li sterpi eretici*, at the valley bottom.[30] This suggestion of an almost impersonal *mana* is, if anything, accentuated by the reports of miraculous visions, one on his mother's part, the other on his godmother's, at, respectively, his gestation and his Baptism. And yet probably the most important feature of the Dominicans to Dante has not been overlooked: Dante's Bonaventure acclaims in St Dominic a teacher – indeed, a 'great doctor', *gran dottor* – who by his words watered the vineyard of the Church when the vines were withering.

Dominic's wisdom, so Bonaventure laments, in a companion piece to Thomas's censure of the Dominicans, is woefully lacking in the current Franciscan Order whose members all too often either shirk the demands of the Rule by an ill-judged laxity, or, equally regrettably, narrow them impossibly: a reference to the controversy between Conventuals and Spirituals which by Dante's lifetime was well and truly raging. Bonaventure's plea here for a *via media* corresponds both to his actual position and to the attempt by pope Nicholas III in the bull *Exiit qui seminat*, issued in 1279, five years after Bonaventure's death, to unite the more tractable among both 'the Community', those who favoured a broad view of Francis's intentions, and the Zelanti. The first of several papal attempts to keep the Order united, it was of little or no avail.

The most controversial element in these three cantos from the *Paradiso* I have left to the last. It links up with the chariot scene in the *Purgatorio*, where, as we saw, the Dominicans and Franciscans, through their combined knowledge and love, are depicted as the wheels of the float on which revelation is carried in the time of the Church. Providence, declares Dante's Thomas, has ordained that 'two princes' should now guide the Church, one on her right hand, one on her left, so that she may go to her 'Beloved', Christ, 'secure in herself and with greater faithfulness to him', *in sè sicura e anche a lui più fida*.[31] The princes are Francis and Dominic, and their role is inherited by their respective Orders: inherited but not, in fact, whether through negligence or folly, actually carried out. This – frankly, exaggerated – account of the importance of the Friars to the Church,[32] suggests the influence on Dante of Joachimism, the apocalyptic spiritual doctrine of the Calabrian Cistercian abbot Joachim of Fiore.[33]

Some of Dante's contemporaries saw in the emergence of the Mendicant Orders a fulfilment of the Joachimite prophecy of a new race of purely evangelical men. In the précis of Joachimism offered by the Anglican historian of mediaeval Franciscanism, Bishop John Moorman, in the new age of the Holy Spirit now, thought Joachim, beginning:

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[30] Ibid., line 100.

[31] Ibid, Canto XI, line 32.

[32] Which was, however, real: see C. H. Lawrence, *The Friars: the Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (London: Longman, 1994).

[33] The classic study remains M. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

> the Church would become corrupt; but two new Religious Orders, living in apostolic poverty, would inaugurate the era in which there would be no need for authoritative institutions, since men would now live according to the Spirit of God.[34]

The number of Joachim's sympathisers included the sixth Minister General of the Friars Minor, John of Parma, St Bonaventure's immediate predecessor in that office; he was, declared the contemporary Franciscan chronicler Salimbene of Parma, *maximus Joachita*, 'massively Joachimist'.[35] The papacy would not brook Joachimism, and John had to resign for this reason. His Dominican counterpart, Humbert of Romans, wrote with John a common letter to both Orders, an epistle saturated with Joachimite sentiments about their providential role 'in these last days at the end of the ages', but somehow he got away with it.[36] Dante's Joachimism, if such it be, is mitigated, but it can hardly be accidental that the circle of figures, expressive in some way of love and service, which, in Bonaventure, intersects with the circle of figures expressive of wisdom for whom Aquinas speaks, includes as its final name *Giovacchino, di spirito profetico dotato*: 'Joachim, who was endowed with a spirit of prophecy'.[37] Like the chariot of revelation on its wheels, Dante placed enormous, excessive, reliance on the Dominicans and Franciscans. He seems to have thought that, quite single-handedly, they could have carried the Church, renewing its life by their wisdom and ardour.

That trust was surely in part autobiographical. After the death of Beatrice Dante had gone to lectures on philosophy in the two Orders' Florentine schools. There is much in the *Commedia* that can be related to the Thomism already dominant in the Dominican school by Dante's lifetime, and a certain amount to the Bonaventurianism which was about to be superseded in the Franciscan school by the influence of Scotus, at any rate until the Capuchin Franciscans, in particular, rediscovered Bonaventure at the end of the sixteenth century.[38]

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[34] J. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, op. cit., p. 115. Bernard McGinn comments, 'Despite the vagueness of the abbot's descriptions of these orders, it would demand considerable effort for the well-disposed not to see in his descriptions a prophecy of the two mendicant orders that were born in the decade after his death'; thus his 'Joachim of Fiore', in *Apocalyptic Spirituality. Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-en-Der, Joachim of Fiore, The Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*, translation and introduction by B. McGinn (London: SPCK, 1979), p. 108.

[35] Cited J. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, op. cit., p. 115.

[36] J. J. Berthier (ed.), *Humbertus de Romanis. Opera de vita regulari* (Rome: Befani, 1889), II., pp. 499–500.

[37] *Paradiso*, Canto XII, lines 140–141. For the links between Joachim and Dante, see L. Tondelli, *Da Gioachino a Dante* (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1944).

[38] C. J. Majchrzak, O. F. M., *A Brief History of Bonaventurianism* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1957), pp. 47–49. Despite the entrusting of the Roman 'College of St Bonaventure' to the Conventual Franciscans by Pope Sixtus V, and

It has to be said that not all Dominicans appreciated Dante. Their criticism of the imperialism of the *De monarchia* could be acidulous,[39] and sometimes spilled over to their attitude to the *Commedia* likewise. In 1335 the Provincial Chapter of the Roman Province of the Order, meeting, as Foster remarks, 'at Florence (of all places)', strictly forbad friars to study it.[40]

By contrast Franciscans may have seen him as one of their own. Some commentators, pondering the 'cord' Dante describes in *Inferno* XVI, speculate he was once a Franciscan novice: the cord is so prominent a feature of Franciscan dress that in France the traditional name for the Minors is *les Cordeliers*.[41] There is also a report (not implausible, but late fifteenth century) that he was a Tertiary, and was buried in the habit.[42] Moreover, Barbara Reynolds in her fine study considers sympathetically the claim that Dante had watched Francis' iconographer, Giotto, working on the frescoes of the Scrovegni chapel in Padua. He took, she thinks, Giotto's narrative art, with its presentation of tableaux of sharply delineated interacting figures, as the model for his own 'arrangement of characters and events'.[43]

Which late reports bring me in conclusion to another, rather more startling, under the heading 'Dante, Mr Gladstone, and Oxford', in which city – where, in both mediaeval and modern times, Dominicans and Franciscans lived and lectured side by side – the present essay was first aired, in lecture form.

A Coda: Dante, Mr Gladstone, and Oxford

Among Gladstone's voluminous correspondence is a letter of 1883: 'In the school of Dante I have learned a great part of that mental provision which has served me to make the journey of human life up to the term of nearly seventy-three years'.[44] A few years later, Gladstone's ruminations on Dante's role in his life caused him

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their production, between 1588 and 1599, of an edition of his works, its theologians were predominantly Scotists. The Capuchin rallying to Bonaventure flowered in the seventeenth century: ibid., pp. 57–66.

[39] As with the Rimini Dominican Guido Vernani, in his *De reprobatione Monarchiae* of c. 1327–1334. See N. Matteini, *Il più antico oppositore politico di Dante: Guido Vernani da Rimini, teste critico del 'De reprobatione Monarchiae'* (Padua: CEDAM, 1958).

[40] K. Foster, *The Two Dantes, and Other Studies*, op. cit., p. 65.

[41] E. G. Gardner, 'St Francis and Dante', in W. Seton (ed.), *Saint Francis: Essays in Commemoration* (London: University of London Press, 1926), p. 70.

[42] A. Martini, 'Dante Francescano', in *VIIo Centenario del Terz'Ordine Francescano*, a special number of *Studi Francescani* for 1921, pp. 119–134.

[43] B. Reynolds, *Dante. The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man* (London and New York: Tauris, 2006), p. 277.

[44] Cited from Morley's life of Gladstone in J. L. Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (London: Longmans, Green, 1938), pp. 699–700.

to pen an article in the Liberal journal *The Nineteenth Century* putting forward the remarkable claim that Dante was at Oxford (Harrow no, but certainly Oxford).[45]

Gladstone's arguments are cumulative. Dante visited Paris. Who with any academic yearnings in the 1300s would take the trouble to travel from Italy to Paris and *not* visit Oxford? Also, the *Commedia* mentions four towns in Flanders, and if one arranges them, as Gladstone does, in the order Douai, Lille, Ghent, Bruges, they form an arrow which points if not directly to Folly Bridge then at least to the Thames estuary. Bruges, judged Gladstone, severe on that charming town which with reason has been compared to Cambridge, could 'not be for him a terminus: it could only be a roadside station'.[46]

Moreover, according to an early fifteenth century source, at the Council of Constance two English bishops were looking for someone to translate the *Commedia* into Latin,[47] and, for Gladstone, whose admonitions against Ultramontanism are probably pertinent here, such a quest was simply unimaginable unless Dante had been in Blighty. As he explains in an argument which is, to say the least, condensed, the search by the bishops:

> can hardly imply less than that there was at the period a still surviving tradition in England which connected Dante personally with the country; or, in other words, which asserted his having been a student at Oxford.[48]

In fact, there is one piece of not inconsiderable evidence which indicates Gladstone could actually be right, and it comes in a letter of Boccacio to Petrarch. And so Gladstone's conclusion, if not his manner of reaching it, may be justified when he writes:

> We shall surely not be told that if he went to Oxford we do not know why he went thither. He did not go to saunter by the Isis, or to scale the height of Shotover: he went to haunts already made illustrious (to cite no other names) by Roger Bacon, by Grossetête, and by Bradwardine. He went to refresh his thirst at a fast-swelling fountainhead of knowledge, and to imp the wings by which he was to mount, and mount so high that few have ever soared above him, into the empyrean of celestial wisdom.[49]

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[45] W. E. Gladstone, 'Did Dante study at Oxford?', *The Nineteenth Century* XXXI (1892), pp. 1032–1042.

[46] Ibid., p. 1036.

[47] As the translator explains in the preface to *Fratris Johannis de Serravalle, Ord. Min. translatio et commentum totius libri Dantis Aldigherii cum textu italico Fratris Bartholomaei a Colle eiusdem ordinis* (Prati: Giachetti, 1891).

[48] W. E. Gladstone, 'Did Dante study at Oxford?', art. cit., p. 1041.

[49] Ibid., p. 1042.

Chapter 9
Poetics in the Russian Diaspora

Introduction

Though we may be tempted to agree with T. S. Eliot that Dante and Shakespeare are the only two names in the Western canon that ultimately count, a Christian discernment must also be applied to responses to the Word (and, indeed, the word – the sheer use of language to express meaning as such) in modern times. This essay considers an Orthodox critic of the contemporary arts – literature, above all – who, expelled from the fledgling Soviet Union, lived most of his life in the West. Vladimir Weidlé (his name, transliterated from Cyrillic script, is sometimes found spelled in English with an initial 'V', rather than 'W'), enjoyed a spell of modest celebrity in the United Kingdom in the 1950s, thanks to Anglo-Catholic interest in his work.[1] More years ago than I care to remember, George Every – who, as a Religious of the Society of the Sacred Mission and a practising poet praised by Eliot, had a twofold reason for sharing this interest – suggested I might look into him. The start of the second decade of the twenty-first century seems a good time to do so, since Weidlé is currently something of a name to conjure with in the Russian Federation, where a selection of his writings have now appeared, newly edited or re-published, for the first time.[2] Previously, they were confined to the West, where in 2002 his major French-language study of poetics was re-issued in Geneva.[3]

The mysterious character of his origins belies the lucid nature of his ideas. Vladimir Vasil'evič Weidlé was born to unknown parents on 1 March 1895 (Old Calendar) in St Petersburg.[4] As a child he was adopted by a German Lutheran banker, originally from Tübingen, and his wife who was an Orthodox from Baltic Russia. His religious formation would be in Orthodoxy, but a German-language

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[1] See the introduction by Martin Jarrett-Kerr of the Community of the Resurrection to Weidlé's best known work in its English translation: *The Dilemma of the Arts* (London: SCM Press, 1948). All works cited are by Weidlé unless otherwise indicated.

[2] The collection, *Umiranie iskusstva* (Moscow: Respublika, 2001) takes its title from the earliest version of the main manifesto of Weidlé's poetics, *Les abeilles d'Aristée*.

[3] *Les abeilles d'Aristée. Essai sur le destin actuel des lettres et des arts* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2002).

[4] There is a brief biography in Antoine Arjakovsky's richly documented study *La generation des penseurs religieux de l'Emigration russe. La Revue 'La Voie' (Put'), 1925–40* (Kiev-Paris: L'Esprit et la Lettre, 2002). I am most grateful to Professor Arjakovsky for sending me a copy of this invaluable resource.

school was otherwise responsible for his education. He was fortunate in growing up in Russia's 'Silver Age', the period of efflorescence of philosophy and the arts which immediately preceded – and to a degree followed, at any rate for a few years – the revolutions of 1917 (through his adoptive mother, he was cousin to the noted Russian cinematographer, Serge Eisenstein). The Silver Age was typified by the reception of a variety of creative impulses from contemporary Western Europe.[5] Thanks to the contrasting linguistic and religious background of his adoptive parents, as well as the high educational and cultural level of their milieu, Weidlé was well-placed to take advantage of it. He could be found at the theatre to sample Vsevelod Meierhold's innovative staging, or visiting an exhibition of recent French art, or attending the Russian premiere of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. A gap year between school and University (St Petersburg, where he read History) was devoted to a tour of Italy. It should be noted that, unlike protagonists in the long drawn out nineteenth century battle in the Russian intelligentsia between Westernisers and Slavophiles, Weidlé believed there was a precedent in Alexander Pushkin for taking a median or, better, a *more comprehensive* view.

> For centuries Russia had had her own classical tradition: an almost exclusively Greek tradition, derived from Byzantium; a tradition that had pierced the very depths of her spiritual life, her language and (through the medium of ecclesiastical Slavonic) her religion. There was no question of denying this tradition, but it had to be rejuvenated and revived; above all it had to be made to converge with the classical tradition of the rest of Europe. This is what Pushkin did, first of all by creating a language in which the western elements were carefully balanced, then by impelling Russian literature, not directly towards the study of Greek or Latin models, but towards what derived from them in Western letters and towards the assimilation of those letters themselves.[6]

He soon established the foundations of a successful academic career. After three years of teaching at the University of Perm', he obtained a lectureship in the history of art at Petrograd (the newly re-named – and secularised – St Petersburg). There he attached himself to the circle of the outstanding Russian poets of the period, notably Anna Akhmatova and Alexander Blok. (His first published article signalled his opposition to the Formalist interpretation of Blok's writing; Weidlé's emphasis would always be on spiritual *content*.)[7] 1924 was a decisive year for

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[5] Here the 'Silver Age' could look back to the 'Golden Age' in early to mid-nineteenth-century Russia. As Weidlé noted, for Pushkin, the effective founder of that earlier renaissance, Russian poetry, and Russian letters generally, could and must be 'fertilized by European literature', *Pushkin 1795–1837* (Paris: Unesco, 1949), p. 17.

[6] Ibid., pp. 24–25.

[7] Weidlé was later concerned to redeem Blok's reputation in émigré circles where his poem 'The Twelve' had scandalised opponents of Bolshevism by its apparent moral identification of the apostles with Red Army soldiers: see his posthumous *Posle*

him, both professionally and personally. He decided he could no longer remain in the Soviet Union but failed to persuade his wife that emigration was the only honourable course. In October of that year he arrived, single and almost penniless, in Paris.

In the sympathetic French context (back in Russia, he had already published on Marcel Proust), and with the resilience of young manhood, he soon began to pick up the pieces of a life. He re-married. He participated in the principal literary enterprises of 'Russia Abroad' in its Parisian manifestation,[8] and acquired an enthusiasm for the painter Marc Chagall, for the *littérateur* André Malraux, and for T. S. Eliot – who was, of course, not only poet but, like Weidlé, critic. In 1929–1930 he worked in London for the Oxford University Press; Eliot, in those years, was similarly engaged, at a more prestigious level of employment, with Faber and Faber. In 1932 he broke new ground by starting to publish in French. His deeply felt Russian identity was combined with a generous cosmopolitanism: hence his sympathy for Goethe's conception of a *Weltliteratur*. That conception, he judged,

> arose both from [Goethe's] feeling that innumerable influences converged from all directions in himself and from his perfectly objective observation of the progressive tightening of bonds that had always existed between national literatures.[9]

Meanwhile, under the influence of the mediaevalist George Fedotov and the systematic theologian Father Sergei Bulgakov, he had returned to the practice of the Orthodox faith. Through Bulgakov's good offices, he obtained a permanent post, teaching the history of art and the history of the Western churches, at the émigré Russian theological school in the Rue de la Crimée, the *Institut Saint-Serge*.[10]

It was, however, Nikolai Berdyaev's invitation to contribute to a conference on 'Christianity and the Crisis of the Arts' in 1933 which prompted the writing of the first draft of his major work, 'The Bees of Aristeas': an 'Essay on the Actual [or 'Present', *actuel*] Destiny of Letters and the Arts'. This began life, modestly

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'Dvenadtsatsi': prinoshenie krestu na mogile Aleksandra Bloka ['After "The Twelve": the Offering of the Cross on the Tomb of Aleksandr Blok'] (Paris: YMCA, 1973).

[8] M. Raeff, *Russia Abroad. A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[9] *Goethe 1749–1832* (Paris: Unesco, 1949), p. 7. He also noted a certain ambivalence, however, in Goethe's attitude to 'world literature': 'Goethe appeals to the Universe with all his soul when he dreams of escaping from Europe, learning Persian and singing Chinese songs. But he wants to conceive this same Universe organically, in the image of Europe, starting from national units grouped in a European community. When he fails to do this he begins to be afraid of the idea, and even Europe sometimes seems to him too large in time and space', ibid., p. 30.

[10] A. Kniazeff, *L'Institut Saint-Serge.De l'Académie d'autrefois au rayonnement d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974).

enough, as two articles, 'The Disintegration of Art' and 'The Renaissance of the Marvellous', in Berdyaev's revival of Trubetskoy's journal *Put'*, 'The Way'. Its first French edition, from 1936, was continually expanded by Weidlé till it reached its final condition, three times the length of the original, in 1954.[11] There was, though, nothing modest about the book's aim: the resurrection of the arts. In the Greek myth, Aristeas, the son of Apollo, wonders why his bees have died. He extracts the truth from Proteus: their perishing follows on the death of Eurydice from a serpent's bite. Only when Aristeas has made a sacrifice of beasts to the dryads do bees re-appear, swarming from the carcasses. In their present ill-fated condition, the arts will only be re-born to newness of life through re-learning the meaning of sacrifice: an act of oblation to the divine creative Source.

In 1952 Weidlé resigned his position at Saint-Serge so as to work full-time for a Munich-based, anti-Soviet, Russian-language radio station, from which he retired in 1957. He continued to publish, chiefly in Russian, on art and poetry until his death in Paris on 5 August 1979.[12] A book of his own poems was published that year.[13] In its 'Postword', written three months before he died, he expressed his bemusement at finding himself somehow in the company of poets he had long sought to describe.[14]

Modern Theory as Subverter of Artistic Practice

In the foreword to the opening section of *Les abeilles d'Aristée* Weidlé comes up with the splendid formulation, 'The present is made up of futures where the past is prolonged'.[15] The force of the maxim is to disarm readers suspicious of

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[11] The 1937 Russian version, *Umiranie iskusstva*, published by the Paris-based YMCA Press, which was by far the most flourishing of the émigré printing-houses – it specialised in philosophy and religion, but also published *belles-lettres* (see M. Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, op. cit., pp. 78–79, 128–129) – took its title from the first of the *Put'* articles. Unlike the French, it remained unaltered, and in 2001 the Moscow publisher Respublika re-issued it as the opening piece in a collection of Weidlé's articles: the decision to use its title for the book was an acknowledgement of its intrinsic importance for Weidlé's thought.

[12] In addition to works cited in the footnotes to this essay, see also *Vechernii den'. Otkliki i ocherki na zapadnie temi* ['The Declining Day: Responses and Sketches on Western Themes'] (New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1952); *Mosaïques palaeochrétiennes et byzantines* (Milan-Florence: Electa Editrice, 1954); *O poetakh i poezii* ['On Poets and Poetry'] (Paris: YMCA, 1973); *Embryologiya Poezii* ['The Embryology of Poetry'] (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves, 1980). A fuller account of Weidlé's poetics (and wider aesthetics) than is offered here would naturally have to investigate these and other sources.

[13] *Na pamiat' o sebe: stikhotvorenya, 1918–1925 i 1965–1979* ['On the Memory of Oneself: Poems'] (Paris: Rifma, 1979).

[14] Ibid., p. 71.

[15] *Les abeilles d'Aristée. Essai sur le destin actuel des lettres et des arts* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954, 4th edition), p. 11.

literary traditionalism. Turning his attention first and foremost to the novel, Weidlé is going to argue that the theoretical preoccupations of cultural Modernism have undermined the ability of those influenced by it to sub-create worlds. (This is a point on which his poetics could well be compared with those of C. S. Lewis – to whom, incidentally, he bore a certain facial resemblance.) The great works of the past, by contrast, present us with imagined worlds so coherent that they never struck us as 'purely imaginary'.

> Reading them, we can repeat the admiring terms especially dear to Goethe – *so wahr, so seiend* – without this *true-ness* implying a conformity with the already known, this *existing-ness* referring to the negligible, trivial, side of existence.[16]

The twentieth century has witnessed the interference in the novelist's art of kinds of thinking that are, to Weidlé's mind, invincibly hostile to imagination. His opening discussion – of Proust's relation to the Impressionists – makes it plain that ontological realism will play a significant part in his analysis. Proust disassociates perception of the object from all other knowledge relevant to the object, choosing to consider precisely such disassociated perception in its instantaneous and discontinuous quality as the only reality worthy of attention (hence his problem with 'lost' time, i.e. the subversion of meaning in an infinitely fragmented temporal experience).[17] The Impressionists wanted to fix on canvas not the world but their perception of the world and not even that perception in its completeness but only the 'pure optic sensation grasped at an unrepeatable instant'.[18] Weidlé's comparison (not unique to himself) would later be summed up in the phrase 'Literary Impressionism'.[19]

Other examples of the interference of theory with unfortunate results are Joyce's *Ulysses*, where every subject introduced is 'subordinated to a formal structure premeditated down to the last detail',[20] and the novels of Sartre whose fiction rejects the side of the object that is turned towards one, in favour of the sides that are not so turned – and in this way succeeds (hardly surprisingly) in emphasising precisely lack of relationship. If the passage from the 'I' to the 'thou'

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[16] Ibid., p. 17.

[17] The reference is, of course, to Proust's great novel, *A la recherche du Temps perdu*, published in seven parts between 1913 and 1927; the new English translation *In Search of Lost Time* (London: Allen Tate, 2002), is based on the authoritative French edition of 1987–1989.

[18] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 171. See for a cognate discussion A. Nichols, O. P., *The Art of God Incarnate. Theology and Image in Christian Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980), pp. 9–11.

[19] M. E. Kronegger, *Literary Impressionism* (New Haven, CT: College and University Press, 1973); the parallels were already drawn in R. Moser, *L'Impressionisme français. Peinture – littérature – musique* (Geneva: Droz, 1952).

[20] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 29.

is shut off while all other elements of the world 'imposed' on one's awareness are felt as 'oppressive', then of course 'cosmic nausea' will be the result.[21] Just as Weidlé linked Proust to the Impressionists, so he associates Sartre in this respect with the artists of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* school whose self-proclaimed 'objectivity' was deliberately drained of human relationship. The affinities, and interplay, of the visual arts with the literary which Weidlé detected are reflected in his own practice.

The American novelists Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck could not be described as over-theoretical, but they too work quite consciously with a defective anthropology. 'Potent animality' belongs no doubt with the 'vital and social' dimensions of the human being, but it does not define the human as such.[22] Nor does the Socialist Realism of the Russian Stalinism of the 1930s with its politicised populism fare any better at Weidlé's hands, and for the same reason. Man cannot be inscribed in literature so long as one has not yet 're-learned to imagine him in his totality'.[23]

Art and the Human Image

For Weidlé, there can 'only be art where there is incarnation' – a key doctrine of any distinctively Christian aesthetic.[24] And if we ask, 'What exactly *is* incarnated in art?', his answer runs: the image of man and the image of the world as it discloses itself to man, for 'all art shares in the human, if only by the presence in it of the artist'.[25] Does this qualifying clause 'if only' cause puzzlement? In that case, it might be helpful to think, for example, of the art of landscape. We might describe the object of that art as, precisely, *non-human* nature. Yet the painter's own feeling-endowed intelligence is highly pertinent to his presentation of a scene. In landscape painting, as an English artist-critic has put it:

> Nature … finds its way into [the painter's] imagination via all his senses; it becomes part of his spirit, and then, with great care and sensitivity, it may be brought back again by hand into the visible world and somehow recognized.[26]

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[21] Ibid., p. 120. Weidlé has in mind, of course, Sartre's influential novel *La Nausée*. Lauding the 'common sky' recognised by a classical/Christian poet such as Eliot in comparison with whom Sartrian sensibility can only appear solipsistic, is the *leit-motif* of A. D. Nuttall, *The Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974).

[22] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 42.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 43.

[25] Ibid.

[26] C. Neve, *Unquiet Landscape. Places and Ideas in Twentieth-Century English Painting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. vii.

Weidlé stresses that, in any depiction of the 'image of man', he does not want a return to naturalism, after the fashion of Emile Zola. Rather than register 'futile appearances', the great novelists were realists in *Shakespeare's* manner: the beings they created at once 'simple and complex', the 'unity and coherence' of their actions not 'logically controllable', not foreseeable.[27] One major condition for creating living persons novelistically is the willingness to ascribe to them continuity of memory, something that requires an act of philosophical faith in the identity of persons over time. Many moderns withhold that necessary act of faith. The message of Pirandello's theatre, so Weidlé points out, might be summed up in the maxim: 'The person is dead, long live the persona'.[28] Freudianism is equally person-unfriendly, for it 'conceives spirit as a clock whose entire structure is in function of the spring [libido] that sets it in motion'.[29]

> Behind the mask ['the moderns'] invariably find something sub-human, a face they declare true because it seems to them sufficiently hideous: if it is not hideous enough, that is because it is still a mask.[30]

How remote from Thomas Aquinas's view that the person is what is most perfect in nature! If that Thomist conviction is true, adds Weidlé, it must surely be because the person does not belong to nature alone. The human person is touched by the divine breath. Where that God-relatedness is denied, then – in a deliberately contemptuous list of possibilities – we are dealing with a 'man-mannikin, man-specimen, man-beast, or man-machine'.[31]

In their experience of the arts, the moderns have tasted, accordingly, the bitter fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that knowledge which permits human beings to deconstruct themselves, if they so desire. Those who seek a renewal of the sense of the human totality in its openness to transcendence (here Weidlé singles out Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, and Eliot, along with Stephan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Blok), may still 'advance toward the temple of Apollo'.[32] Yet it seems they find it hard to shake off the Positivist incubus which specialises in cutting things down to size – or, rather, to below their size. The poetic language of even the best of the Moderns, when it is compared with that of, say, the Elizabethans, appears rather forced, and tending to either flaccidity or dryness. The conviction that the range of traditional strophes is exhausted, like the orders of architecture and the main forms of European music, is, for Weidlé, disabling. With the loss of metre go too the 'regulative modalities of rhythm', and

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27 *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 50.

28 Ibid., p. 60.

29 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

30 Ibid., p. 73.

31 Ibid., p. 74.

32 Ibid., p. 78.

the distinction between poetry and prose becomes hard to maintain.[33] Imagism, for which the emotive value of a word or an object evoked by a word is what counts, could perfectly well content itself with prose.

The Primacy of Poetic Knowledge

More widely, in Weidlé's judgment, what contemporary poetry needs is 'extreme metaphorisation', the only recourse when a language has become too thin to be a suitable vehicle for poetry. Despite what classical rhetoricians may have thought, metaphor is far from being mere ornament in speech. Rather, metaphor

> followed from the poetic knowledge of each thing, it witnessed to the essential unity of the universe, all of whose parts could enter into reciprocal relation, and where each part could evoke another, where all participated in all.[34]

Such a view of poetic knowledge may still be postulated, but it is no longer directly perceived. It is undermined by an overly cerebral attitude to metaphor which assumes that metaphors are not ontologically informative, that they presuppose nothing save language itself, and that poet and audience rightly take it that any significance they may seem to convey has an 'as if' character from start to finish. A writer like Mallarmé may have considered he was aiming at 'pure poetry' but what he wrote resembled bits of mosaic rather than the music he sought. He (and others) failed to realise poetry is a 'medium where the work bathes from its origin', not an element to be distilled in a pipette.[35]

The trouble is not a lack of technical ability; if anything, technical procedures are excessively accentuated. What is wrong is the entire mind-set. There is far too much concentration on the subjective conditions of artistic perception whereas poetry should actually place itself at the service of the objective coherence of man and the world. In the upshot, 'human existence is sacrificed to poetic somnambulism'.[36] Poetic language is made to say anything, whereupon it ends up by saying nothing at all.

Though concern with subjective conditions and absorption in technique may seem mutually exclusive strategies for an artist, Weidlé argues they are really complicit options. In the visual arts, Impressionism, which exemplifies the first, leads to Cubism, which embodies the second, and in a comparable fashion, in literature Proust and Musil lead to Joyce. Weidlé offers his explanation in the form of a rhetorical question:

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 88.

35 Ibid., p. 99.

36 Ibid., p. 104.

> If the world is nothing other than my vision of the world, why should not the latter be reduced to the ensemble of means I use to arouse it or suggest it to you?[37]

A Recipe for Artistic Renaissance

So where should we look? Some would say to a universal rationality. But people are not going to be united with each other in their *interior* life by calculative reason or indeed by conceptual thought. Rather, a trans-rational mode of relating to the world must be sought. Weidlé is not (yet) talking, he explains, about love or faith or creativity, though what he is talking about is, he says, relevant to all of these. Specifically, he is speaking of 'that imaginative, intuitive, thinking in which faith and love are thought and along whose paths creation is realised'.[38] The artist's mission entails making use of just such thinking – and when he succeeds his practice is exemplary for the rest of us. It is not, of course, his job to institute values (here Weidlé sets his face against the Promethean concept of the artist espoused by Romantic ultras). His task is, rather, to 'discern and appreciate them, and subordinate them one to another' (as does discursive thought when it separates out true from false – so this is not an anti-rational proposal), and to 'incarnate them in concrete forms, accessible to the senses, relatively stable though always alive' (an achievement to which rationality by itself cannot aspire).[39] The general exercise of creativity in human culture has a special and paradigm instance in creativity in the arts.

Using frankly religious language, Weidlé speaks of the artist offering to the 'creative Principle' of the universe the 'oblation' or 'sacrifice' of achieved artistic creation, on behalf of the community that 'tacitly delegates to him' this role.[40] 'Delegation' is a striking term in this context. Weidlé held, surely correctly, that pre-Romantic poets and artists from Aeschlyus to Poussin were joined at the very source of their creative work with what nourished spiritually the human beings who surrounded them. Other people 'supported them by the very fact of their presence.'[41] Their work presupposed the dramatic narrator's sharing a common consciousness with his hearers, the visual artist with his viewers, even if at times (Michelangelo and Rembrandt, say, at the end of their lives) what artistic creators produced was found difficult. This is why Weidlé comes to his most crucial, if also most general, conclusion. 'Only a deep spiritual renewal can give art the conditions of life proper to it', distinguishing in so doing an 'organic community

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37 Ibid., p. 112.
38 Ibid., p. 123.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 124.

of beliefs' from 'the brutal triumph of an ideology' (evidently Soviet Russia is in view in the latter phrase).[42]

Subject Matter and Style

Weidlé's pessimism about the contemporary condition of the arts is well expressed in the title of the central section of *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, 'The Midnight of Art'. Provocatively, Weidlé calls Romanticism the 'death of style'. The Romantic artist can choose to express himself in whatever way he wishes, but this is not what style is about. Style is not just a formal category. Style is bound up with the spiritual content of the artwork, or 'more exactly, it is style that best assures the intimate fusion of form and ground (*de la forme et du fond*), the total indissolubility of their marriage'.[43] Moreover, style is, or should be, the sign of a 'common soul', the shared approach of artist and audience.[44] Romanticism is typified by solitude, whether proudly asserted or resignedly accepted, and this is the opposite of the community of souls where roots go down deeper than the individual 'I'. Here Weidlé brackets late eighteenth and early nineteenth century classicism with Romanticism, since such neo-classicism, in his view, represents mere nostalgia for a style.[45] And he links to both the twentieth century museum where all works are granted equivalent status no matter how irreconcilable their styles in a setting where each is cut off from its natural context and all meaning save the narrowly artistic is excluded.[46]

Weidlé anticipates the post-Modern when he calls the contemporary scene a paradise of *bricolage*, picking and choosing, a state of affairs he is inclined to ascribe to the arrival of extra-European *objets d'art* which, for want of any widespread awareness of their background, could only be appreciated by 'sampling' (the comparison is with the French practice of *dégustation des vins*). The aesthetic is just the start of *real* penetration of a work of art which can only enter the depths of my humanity if I have entered deeply into not only the object

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42 Ibid., p. 127.

43 Ibid., p. 145.

44 Ibid., p. 152.

45 Here he reflects Pushkin's view that genuine 'Romance' was found in the poetry of old Europe between the end of the ancient world and the advent of Romanticism, excluding 'the French classical tragedians and a few works which had closely followed the example of Greece and Rome'. That privileged, then, the 'poetry of Christian and chivalrous inspiration with all its later developments': thus *Pushkin 1795–1837*, op. cit., p. 26.

46 The supreme instance is surely the Bolshevik housing of the *Vladimirskaia*, the icon of the Mother of God of Vladimir, in Moscow's Tretyakov gallery – not mentioned, however, by Weidlé, though he calls this image incomparable in its 'sublime and delicate perfection', *Les Icônes byzantines et russes* (Florence: Electa, 1950), no pagination.

but the object's 'beyond', (*l'au-delà de l'oeuvre*), the field of play of the wider meanings it opens up.[47]

The Crisis of Art

Weidlé's judgment of twentieth century art (above all in France where the metaphysical crisis of art was most acutely registered) was certainly harsh. If the Impressionists were focussed on the vibrations of light registered on the retina, the Expressionists translated into paint the vibrations of the nervous system. Inevitably, both decomposed experience. The group knows as *Les Fauves* vainly sought to reinforce sensation by emotion, while Henri Matisse opted instead for a calculative abstraction of quintessence. Paul Cézanne, however, constitutes for Weidlé a genuine breakthrough in the ontology of art. He 'alone' of his contemporaries saw what was at stake in this discussion.

> He asked of his art the same plenitude of incarnation which was lacking to his time and is lacking even more to ours. He wanted to re-build everything anew by starting out from … a new comprehension of the world as form and colour, which was equivalent to the discovery of a still unknown correspondence between the contemplated and the represented, between the real and the imaginary (*l'imaginaire*).[48]

He was misunderstood, the great architect mistaken for a mere engineer, and his procedures of construction combined with those of Paul Seurat (a radical Impressionist) to end up in Cubism. And that is not, for Weidlé, a happy fate, since whereas the Cubist, unlike the Impressionist, analyses an object and not just his own vision, the kind of analysis he provides decomposes that object less to realise it on his canvas than to demonstrate its structure – after the fashion of a 'professor of stereometry'.[49] Pablo Picasso's art, for instance, shows 'human creation the prisoner of its own liberty, condemned to turn round and round indefinitely in aestheticism's chamber of mirrors'.[50]

What for Weidlé has gone wrong in the recent history of art is the obsession with pure form – to the exclusion of concern with spiritual content, for which he has recourse to the useful German word *Gehalt* (to be distinguished – but not uncoupled – from the word for material content, *Inhalt*).[51] While agreeing that concern with content can also have its vices – as in anecdotal poetry, programme

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47 *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 166.

48 Ibid., p. 173.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., p. 174.

51 Ibid., p. 175. Normally, spiritual content is expressed via material content, though, admittedly, in music, unlike the other arts, the latter may reach vanishing point.

music, the documentary novel, and 'academic' studio painting and sculpture, the baby must not for all that be thrown out with the proverbial bathwater. Weidlé traces what he finds to be a certain ambivalence in T. S. Eliot's ruminations on this question. In his (1935) introduction to the poems of Marianne Moore, Eliot drew attention to the inescapable importance of subject-matter,[52] whereas in his (1948) essay 'Edgar Poe et la France',[53] draft of the better known 'From Poe to Valéry',[54] he was willing to relegate subject-matter to a purely instrumental status in the making of a poem. Actually, at least in the mature English (or American) form of Eliot's offering, the 'willingness' referred to is Valéry's rather than Eliot's own. Eliot had just been considering the idea of *la poésie pure*, which is close enough to what Weidlé termed an art of pure form. When speaking in his own voice, Eliot in this essay continued to maintain that:

> poetry is only poetry so long as it preserves some 'impurity' in this sense: that is to say, so long as the subject matter is valued for its own sake.[55]

Weidlé did not discuss, moreover, in what way (if at all) in these passages Eliot was conscious of the *Gehalt*/*Inhalt* distinction on which, in the Russian aesthetician's judgment, so much can turn.

The misprision of Eliot's meaning (if such it be) bears witness to Weidlé's touchiness about anything that might subvert a key feature of his message: art is a transmutation of the object in a living unity of form and ground. It is, for him, a great mistake to suppose that, in the arts, giving such primacy to subject-matter leads to Philistinism. What marks out the country of Philistia is that there the community is without soul and its religion without transcendence – which can also be expressed by saying that Philistia is only a simulacrum of a community, essentially incapable of producing the glass of Chartres or Dante's *Commedia*. The refusal of contemporary art to grant subject-matter its due is revenged by the massive public interest in photography, which grows in direct proportion to art's betrayal of its own 'human, and more than human, essence'.[56] What we lose is 'the world transfigured by a creative act, in its living totality'.[57]

The fervour of Weidlé's campaign against formalism is illuminated by some remarks in his wide-ranging essay on Russian culture, *La Russie absente et*

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[52] T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction', in M. Moore, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935).

[53] Originally a lecture at the University of Aix, printed in *La Table ronde* 12 (1948), pp. 1973–1992.

[54] A lecture at the Library of Congress, which issued it as a pamphlet, but more accessibly published in T. S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writings* ([1965] London: Faber and Faber, 1978), pp. 27–42.

[55] Ibid., p. 39.

[56] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 185.

[57] Ibid.

présente, of which an English translation appeared in 1952.[58] The 'defiance of form' which often strikes the Western reader when reading Russian poetry and the Russian novel (he has just been discussing Nikolay Nekrassov and Leo Tolstoy) is not, he thinks, 'simply an incidental weakness, a mere aberration', for it has 'far deeper roots, religious in character, in the Russian soul'.[59] Weidlé's argument is sophisticated. Mediaeval Russia knew nothing of this 'revolt against form'.

> Her ikon painters, her architects and preachers, never feared to aspire to formal perfection: in beauty, as they saw it, there was nothing scandalous.[60]

How to explain, then, that revolt in modern Russian literature? It is a response to the interposition, in the interval since the Middle Ages, of a naturalistic picture of beauty anathema to the Russian spirit. For artists in pre-Petrine Russia, beauty was a reflection of the divine glory. The Petrine revolution that produced the 'laicised Russia' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ushered in, among other things, a new aesthetic: a 'beauty that had descended to the earth, a beauty separate from other attributes of divinity and distinct from all celestial beatitude'.[61] Such naturalism provoked an allergic reaction which Weidlé finds, in terms of his own metaphysic, entirely salutary.

> There is no clearer sign of the persistence in the Russian soul of the need for religion than its deliberate refusal of this state of affairs. For the hatred of forms … is ultimately nothing else but the refusal to recognize any value at all in complete isolation, wrenched from the unity of all values in God.[62]

Just as love of the truth and aspiration after the good are synthesised in the Russian word *pravda* (translated, with loss of resonance, then, 'truth' in Western languages), so likewise in the Church Slavonic used in the liturgy of Russian Orthodoxy beauty and goodness are synthesised in the word *dobrota*: 'a beauty that is good, goodness that is beautiful; in comparison with this, the good by itself would appear merely insipid and beauty by itself a dangerous abstraction'.[63] The beautiful in art, if it arouses suspicions of not being at the same time true and good, typically stimulates in Russians, so Weidlé reports, a reaction that is akin to shame. These assertions of *La Russie absente et présente* are, I find, extraordinarily close in spirit to the crucial opening section of the theological aesthetics of the Swiss dogmatician Hans Urs von Balthasar, where he announces his theme of the

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58 *Russia: Absent and Present* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952).

59 Ibid., p. 142.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., p. 143.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

unity of the 'transcendentals' – beauty, goodness, and truth – and the profound inconveniences that follow from their separation.[64]

The Cul-de-Sac of Abstraction

Weidlé's objection to pure form underlies his criticism of abstract art. Whether painters prefer to represent the world or not, the main thing is that they should not be preoccupied solely with their painting (*le tableau*) – that is to say, with the *form of their painting* (*la peinture*). When the painter and stained glass artist Jean Bazaine hails Vermeer as a trail-blazer of abstractionism since with him perfection of form seems to render the subject matter irrelevant, all unwittingly he hands Weidlé the key to twentieth century theorising about abstract art. Here, unadorned, is its basic principle:

> Since in the figurative art of the past nothing counts for our aesthetic pleasure save form, we might as well only sculpt and paint forms and abandon figuration to photographs.[65]

Weidlé's identification of the trio of errors in this claim is, I find, one of the high points of *Les abeilles d'Aristée*. In the first place, aesthetic pleasure is itself only an abstraction, surely, from the complex concreteness of experiencing a work of art. Secondly, the renunciation of figuration entails abandoning a host of formal possibilities – including the exploration of deformation, which, after all, bears an intrinsic reference to the nature that undergoes distortion. Thirdly, painted or sculpted form acts *both* by what it is *and also* by what it signifies. What is plastic form, other than décor, once it is swept clean of signifying? What Weidlé deplored in abstract art was not so much the lack of figuration as such, and more the 'human void' it opened up.[66] Modern art that continues to value figure may still treat it as brutally factual, without further symbolic expressiveness for man.

A Hermeneutic of Rupture

Weidlé really does see the entire history of art as cut into two by the advent of the contemporary epoch. Previously, artistic creation had its starting-point in a spiritual community open to the cosmos – and its style, at once personal and transcending personal existence, testified to that. But now such creation has become simply an instrument in our hands, reflecting nothing beyond individual

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[64] H. U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetic. I. Seeing the Form* (ET Edinburgh: T. &. T. Clark, 1979), pp. 17–26.

[65] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 191.

[66] Ibid., p. 192.

will (or, for Surrealists and certain Romantics, instinct). Even when an artist is interested in some aspect of one of his predecessors, that is by individual choice. Granted multiple choice, one might think art would become more human, rather than less. In fact it has become an 'art without man'.[67] It has also become inorganic and non-integral.

On the assumption of a commonality of all the arts, Weidlé finds the chief symptom thereof in the condition of new music, and notably the hard times on which melody has fallen. For him, melody is the 'soul and symbol of music', and he applauds the philosopher Henri Bergson's decision to take melody as the 'best image of the living continuity, the indivisible unity, that grows and develops in time'.[68] Abstracting melody from musical structure offends against organism and the attempts of modern composers to find surrogates for melody (whether in sonority, as with Debussy and Ravel, or in rhythm, as with Stravinsky, or in the 'vibratory sense', as in jazz, or in extra-musical poetic and dramatic elements, as with Benjamin Britten), only confirm Weidlé in the conviction that music where melody is discountenanced cannot be integral music.

In essence these two objections – one in the name of organism, the other in the name of integralness – are the same, and Weidlé defends them with citations from writers as disparate as Augustine and Baudelaire. Weidlé finds the arts of his time to be divided between esotericism and populism, with artists addressing themselves either to a tiny elite or to a lowest-common-denominator mass audience. The schism involved is not, however, as absolute as some say, since in both cases recourse is had to the 'methodical invention of procedures susceptible of provoking certain reactions, definable in advance' – a notion alien, he thinks, to both high art and popular art in the past.[69] Art as it is coming now to be

> will serve man, no doubt, but in diminishing him, in reducing him to the minimum of humanity. It will serve him instead of serving with him the unforeseeable work, instead of being a repudiation of all contingencies, a most high praise, a thanks-giving a thousand times re-commenced and always new.[70]

To Weidlé, the arts are now in danger of no longer being creation, but only construction. Comparing these two *modi operandi* of the artist, Weidlé finds that two things, missing in 'construction', are present in 'creation': union with nature and the participation of the whole man.[71] Artistic creation adds to nature by joining with nature and continuing nature, rather than treating it as a mere utilitarian resource. Moreover, the artistic creator, rather than constructor, works 'by hoping for the assistance of the [divine] Modeller', God as Source of all forms, and he

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67 Ibid., p. 194.
68 Ibid., p. 197.
69 Ibid., p. 201.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., p. 207.

works with 'his imagination, his reason, his muscles and entrails, in the sweat of his brow and the fearful joy of his heart'.[72] The constructor, half an engineer and half a mechanic, has replaced love of creation – one of the modes of the love of God – with the pride of construction. And so far as the means of his working are concerned, the desire of man to be angel has made him not beast but, what is worse, machine. There has been a 'great refusal', the topic of the last chapter of 'The Midnight of Art' before Weidlé embarks on the concluding section of *Les Abeilles*, 'The Office of Tenebrae [i.e. darkness]'.

Weidlé identifies the origin of the disintegration of the (in his eyes artistically optimal) religious culture of mediaeval Christendom in the 'wholly new consciousness the artist had of himself and his art'.[73] The work the artist set himself was to be achieved by recourse to personal means, 'original in relation to his contemporaries, novel in relation to the tradition'.[74] (Of course, there had been novelties before – but in the earlier cases novelty was not itself a good to be aimed at.) The titanism of the Renaissance originates in a threefold artistic pride: pride in knowing oneself to be an artist, pride in raising oneself above one's predecessors, and pride in being oneself.

Weidlé is, however, too subtle a thinker not to enter a caveat at this point. The paganism on which the Renaissance drew had itself been a religious paganism, and, in that respect, was fully compatible with artistic creation. Moreover, in the late Antique period it had been so penetrated by the Christian faith that any revival of its spirit and forms left open the permanent possibility of 'conversion' – i.e. re-conversion to Christianity.

> The mystery is there, delicately infused in the calm and human nobility of the last works of Raphael; its epiphany via storm and distress shakes the old age of Titian and Michelangelo; the entire Baroque is a conversion of the Renaissance for while it brings back to life Dionysus and Apollo in their first splendour, it makes them announcers despite themselves of the unknown God …[75]

The art of the Renaissance is not yet emancipated (to speak with irony) from spiritual community. And yet it prepares the way for that false dawn by making possible the artist's glorying in his own autonomous power, isolated from others and separate from the world, and this *does* effectively sustain the 'revolt' with which Weidlé is concerned. Weidlé thinks that Leonardo is on the border of that revolt – half creative artist, half constructivist engineer, and in this way the starting-point of aesthetic rationalism to which he regards Edgar Allan Poe's brief study of the process of artistic composition in the 1846 essay 'The Philosophy of Composition' as key, thus confirming one of Eliot's claims in 'From Poe to Valéry':

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72 Ibid., p. 208.

73 Ibid., p. 213.

74 Ibid., p. 214.

75 Ibid.

Poe was taken far more seriously as a theoretician of the arts in France than he ever was in Anglo-America (indeed, some Anglo-Saxon critics have considered Poe's essay to be a hoax). Not that Weidlé approves of this particular Gallic enthusiasm. Compared with Goethe's account of the organic unity of the artwork in, for example, the celebrated 1827 letter to Zelter, Poe's account of planning the poetic process by a 'prior pharmocopeia' is actually 'rather puerile'.[76] The upshot of Poe's influence in France is glimpsed in Valéry's poetics in which any *gift* of poetic art, over and above the power of reason to calculate art's demands, is a humiliation for the artist – albeit, perhaps, a necessary one.[77]

The Significance of Negative Capability

The best of the Romantics knew they were in a desert. 'All the evasions date from then, and all the agonies.'[78] The most clear-sighted of them saw the need, in the exercise of their art, for a radical change. Though the word might be far from their lips, the *mot juste* was 'conversion', or better, its Greek original, *metanoia*, which means not only change of belief and morals but transfiguration of the soul. This meant, among other things, extending cognitively our sense of the range of the real.

Weidlé lays great emphasis, in this connexion, on Keats' much-cited reference, in a letter of December 1817, to 'negative capability' – the ability to remain in the imperfect certainty that belongs to the notion of mystery without 'irritable reaching after fact and reason'.[79] While criticising both Keats' attempts to explain his meaning and indeed the verbal form he gave the negative capability idea (Keats had in mind something supremely positive, so why introduce the term 'negative'?), Weidlé holds that the English Romantic was onto something of capital importance. Over and above what a 'calculating and separative, practical and scientific' use of reason can ascertain,[80] there lies in reality an 'un-analysable residue' which is rendered for us by another, non-discursive, mode of thinking,[81] for which the best

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[76] Ibid., p. 226.

[77] Valéry's study of Leonardo brings home Weidlé's point: 'Himself [Leonardo] could regard as an ideal realization of the beautiful and intelligent animal, absolutely supple and free; capable of many methods of progress; knowing on the slightest indication from its rider, without difficulty or delay how to change from one method to any other', P. Valéry, *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci* (London: John Rodker, 1929), p. 10, and again: 'Leonardo, proceeding from research to research, attains to quite simply a steadily more perfect mastery over his own nature', ibid., p. 11.

[78] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op cit., p. 235.

[79] G. F. Scott (ed.), *Selected Letters of John Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, revised edition), p. 60.

[80] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op cit., p. 238.

[81] Ibid., p. 242.

word is perhaps 'mythopoetic'.[82] Mythopoetic thought adverts to the presence of the unanalyzed, Keats's 'mystery'. Aware of philosophical foes, Keats chose to express himself defensively, appealing to a negative. His real intent is disclosed, however, in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*'s identification of truth with beauty, where by 'truth' Keats means the 'metaphysical essence of things', and by 'beauty' he has in mind 'what is perceived or conceived imaginatively'.[83] Though Weidlé holds that, *au fond*, Keats and Coleridge are in agreement on the matter, he warns against confounding such non-discursive thought with the 'willing suspension of disbelief' of which Coleridge speaks in the *Biographia Literaria*.[84] We are not speaking of how we entertain, for the duration of our reading, a voluntary delusion such as the existence of fairies (Coleridge was thinking in this phrase of the fantastic and non-realist aspects of literature, but he attains to a doctrine more like Keats' when, a little later in the same work, he writes of imagination as the 'synthetic perception' which furnishes 'poetic genius' with its 'soul').[85] The sort of poetic imagination which 'prevents us from taking leave of the human' makes fully ontological claims.[86] Though 'truth, as Keats understands it, is not conformity with things', it is nevertheless 'conformity with the meaning of things' – conformity, then, with what is 'scientifically unverifiable, since, by definition, one may say, the very notion of meaning is empty of meaning for scientific thought'.[87]

For Weidlé the argument has not advanced much further since the Romantic age. Even an aesthetician like Benedetto Croce who allowed the thinking subjacent to art the name of 'knowledge',[88] does so (precisely) only nominally, since for him, 'of that which [art] knows it teaches us nothing, merely drawing out forms and words'.[89] Hence it is hardly surprising to find the emergence of a frankly non-cognitive school of criticism, eminently represented by I. A. Richards, for whom the utility of art is principally the condition of psychic equipoise in which it places

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 243.

[84] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia literaria, or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions* (Menston: The Scolar Press, 1971, reprinting the 1817 edition), II., p. 2.

[85] Ibid., p. 11.

[86] The British-born American poet Denise Levertov, in her last years a convert to Catholicism, defined imagination as 'the power of perceiving analogies and extending this power from the observed to the surmised', thus 'A Conversation with Denise Levertov', *Christianity and Literature* 45 (1996), p. 220, cited in J. Schwartz, 'To Imagine Realistically', *Logos* I. 1 (1997), p. 21.

[87] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 244.

[88] See M. C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present. A Short History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975), pp. 318–324. Synthesising Beardsley's account of Croce's early and later aesthetics: while Croce describes art as intuitive knowledge, all art expresses an intuition which represents, albeit universalised in form, a feeling.

[89] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 249.

us.[90] In Weidlé's acid comment, 'Nothing remains today of the identity the Greek language established between the beauty of the cosmos and its reality save this one vocable: cosmetic'.[91] Though the artist may react to such reductive criticism by either rejection or flight, the option of acquiescence is scarcely open to him except at the price of the 'complete elimination of art to the profit of the [historical] document or the [mathematical or scientific] theorem'.[92] *Pace* Richards, he or she cannot consent to become a mere 'lemonade seller'.[93]

The Reunion of Mythos and Logos

The remedy lies in the reunion of mythos and logos, the divorce between which was already looming in Plato's dialogues. Weidlé values Nietzsche's observation (Weidlé may be thinking of a passage in *Untimely Meditations*)[94] to the effect that myth is not the result of thought but is itself thought – of a kind.[95] Though not conceptual thought it has nevertheless an intelligible structure. Mythical thought is not entirely a-logical or pre-logical.

> Myth and Logos can coexist for centuries within the same thought, and the expansion of the latter, if it limits the field of the former, does not do so without first enhancing its value and extending its bearings.[96]

When in the *Phaedo* Socrates remarks that he is not a 'mythologian', the Greek language expresses his meaning to perfection, for he wishes to disjoin logos from myth – not to subvert poetry, art, religion, but so as to leave them a place apart. This created an unfortunate gap – indeed, abyss – between creative imagination and *la raison raisonnante*. The rhetor in *Hippias major* is incorrect when criticising Socrates' habit of abstraction, for the latter is essential to developing the possibilities of conceptual thought. But he is correct in wanting to defend the rights of non-conceptual thought, which also has its place. That Socrates' (or Plato's) triumph over Hippias was unconditional has made us 'unlearn' how to see the 'integral unity, the concrete corporeity of things, including the things of the

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[90] Richards' *Science and Poetry* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926) may be in mind rather than his better known later work *Practical Criticism. A Study of Literary Judgment* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1929), which sees poetry as not only emotive but also referential.

[91] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 251.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., p. 252.

[94] F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* IV. 9.

[95] See J. Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 53.

[96] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 257.

spirit, as they present themselves to the imagination'.[97] A logos without mythos is as bad as a mythos without logos. Weidlé appeals instead for a recovery of a sense of the unity of the two, and acknowledgement of the *hierarchy of functions* where each has its place. This is a far cry from surrender to irrationalism.

> [W]hat can master the sheer irrationality of instincts and passions is not reasoning, but a discipline, a love and a faith that are not of their essence narrowly rational. Chesterton said very appositely that the true lunatic is not the man who has lost his reason but the man who has lost everything except reason.[98]

Art withers in a world where the irrational is 'only rationalized – rather than humanized by the simultaneous action of Mythos and Logos'. This is the ambience in which art has always lived and can only live.[99] In the periodic phenomenon of artistic 'returns' to the past, what artists were seeking, thinks Weidlé, is not so much the art of the past as the *conditions under which that art flourished*.

> Nietzsche was mistaken. The apogee of a civilization is not the reign of Myth but the moment of perfect equilibrium between Myth and Logos.[100]

His was not however a straightforward mistake. In the present conjuncture it is the mythopoeic element which has fallen out of the complex whole and so it is for that we are thirsty.

This is Weidlé's explanation for the proliferation of lost paradises (he begins by mentioning Gauguin and Stevenson, who sought literal ones in the South Seas). Easier options are ruralism (a motif of Thomas Hardy, Leo Tolstoy, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and Giovanni Verga, and, among Weidlé's contemporaries, Knut Hamsun and Sigrid Undset in Norway, Sergei Esenin and Leonid Leonov in Russia,[101] as well as many others) or recourse to *das ewig Kindliche*, the child persona within

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[97] Ibid., p. 258. Compare William Lynch's statement that by 'the total and most ordinary workings of the human imagination' is meant how 'men look at the concrete reality of our finite world': W. F. Lynch, S. J., 'Theology and the Imagination', *Thought* 29 (1954), pp. 61–86, and here at p. 62. What, though, of Weidlé's reference in this context to 'things of the spirit'? Some light is thrown by the way he invokes St Paul's distinction between 'body' and 'flesh' in the First Letter to the Corinthians, in order to write of icon-painters that they seek to paint the 'body of the spirit' (pneumatic or supernaturalised corporeality) rather than 'that of the soul': thus *Les Icônes byzantines et russes*, op. cit., no pagination.

[98] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 261.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., p. 262.

[101] Such ruralism – 'village prose' – had a major revival in Russia in the Brezhnev years: P. J. S. Duncan, 'Orthodoxy and Russian Nationalism in the USSR, 1917–1988', in G. Hosking (ed.), *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 319–320.

(and in the latter category Weidlé includes the widely assorted quartet of Jules Verne, Lewis Carroll, Hans Christian Andersen, and Alain Fournier, all of whom he approves, as well as, less flatteringly, the 'systematic *puerilisme*' of Gertrude Stein and the 'no less systematic refusal of responsibility that marks the effervescent years of the Futurist, Dadist, and Surrealist movements').[102]

> The more our knowledge becomes abstract and our feelings differentiated, the more do we desire the original fusion of imagination and experience. The more the art that surrounds us is artificial and cerebral, the more are we nostalgic for an art that is spontaneous, ingenuous and unaware of its own perfection.[103]

Far from spurning such literary tendencies as escapist, Weidlé considers them to be a salutary sign. They are, if at times desperately, gestures towards the recuperation of holy ground, expressions of the need, on the part of the imagination, for a climate in which to breathe. Yes, it is a matter of return, but return not so much to the primitive as to the elementary in the strong sense of that term, to the 'as yet undifferentiated totality of existence which the writer would like to render as such, without submitting it to those analytic operations that end up by becoming an obstacle to the normal birth of the artwork'.[104] Weidlé interprets such return to the earth or to childhood as, first and foremost, a 'return to myth and to mythical thought'.[105] These are ways to re-approach the wondrous world, and they have the advantage that they do not run the risks inevitably involved in purely personal myth-making. Some of these writers incorporate some version of a Christian vision – Weidlé mentions among others the Fleming Felix Timmermans whose inspiration he finds essentially Franciscan,[106] and the slighter oeuvre of the Anglo-Welshman Theodore Francis Powys, who likewise opens up a world that is capable of mystery (shades of Keats's letter to his brothers), simultaneously open to the human and the divine.[107]

Weidlé's employment of the word 'paradise' should not be misconstrued. As he insists, it is not a question of an imagined world without evil, fear, suffering, but of 'countries from which contemplation has not been chased away', landscapes that for this reason appear paradisal when compared with the 'comfortable hell' of adult urban civilisation.[108]

There remains one possible paradise which may be visited without leaving (geographically – compare ruralism, or existentially – compare the return to

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102 *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 271.

103 Ibid., pp. 264–265.

104 Ibid., p. 274.

105 Ibid., p. 278.

106 G. Durnez, *Felix Timmermans: een biografie* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2001).

107 N. Braybrooke et al., *Theodore. Essays on T. F. Powys* (Aylesford: St Albert's Press, 1964).

108 *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 279.

childhood) where we are. And this is the world of the unconscious. But the irony is that, just as writers were turning, increasingly, to seek to tap these 'subterranean waters', psychoanalysis 'claimed to have reserved their exploitation for itself'.[109] Weidlé was viscerally anti-Freudian: what, he asked, could be liberating about declaring the unconscious to be under the control of determining laws, its least movement governed by a uniform automatism? The unconscious, as Freud conceived it, is

> no longer the limitless ocean of dreams and images, the microchaos which serves to create the microcosm of the poet; it is the poorly maintained sub-soil of a vast laboratory, all encumbered with odd objects which his theory proposed to put promptly into order. How the imagination suffers there when it finds all it has left is hardly more than pre-fabricated materials.[110]

Freud was nothing but an old Positivist; for the Surrealists to have flocked to his banner was itself surreal, though fortunately their practice could be better than their theory.

> The unconscious is mechanized as soon as one seeks to grasp it by deliberate intent and to exploit it in its raw state, without submitting it to that natural work of humanization – of personalization – which in normal conditions is achieved spontaneously by each human consciousness and a fortiori by the artist albeit in a mode proper to himself.[111]

As Weidlé is careful to insist:

> The Negative Capacity … in no way consists in eliminating the rational from the region over which the creative imagination puts forth its power; on the contrary, it consists in ensuring that, in that region, the irrational (or what could appear such) is not disassociated from the rational. The imagination does *not* disassociate: it takes as its staring-point complex givens some of which are transparent to reason and some of which are not, and it makes use of them without stripping them of their complexity.[112]

So recourse to the land, to childhood, to the unconscious, these are three examples of 'return', but their results are not always happy. In all these cases, an abyss can open up that is filled with 'groaning and cruel images'[113] – which brings Weidlé to the topic of the poetic equivalent of the descent into hell.

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109 Ibid., p. 280.
110 Ibid., p. 281.
111 Ibid., pp. 282–283.
112 Ibid., p. 286.
113 Ibid., p. 288.

Destructive Obsessions

Weidlé lays part of the blame for the destructive obsessions of the arts in the twentieth century on an experience which was certainly hellish for those in the front line: the First World War. He argues that the mass mobilisation involved affected the European imagination in a way no war had done before. The terrible experience of combatants could 'not be embodied in any work and served to render incomplete any other incarnation', something especially notable, he thought, among the English war poets.[114] From the 1920s onwards, the 'endemic revolution and intermittent warfare' of succeeding decades made writers 'belong too much to their time, espouse too closely its conflicts, struggles, sufferings, problems – which made them sometimes forget that behind them lie the equivalents of all times'.[115] The consequence was 'a certain inaptitude to maintain the travail of imagination until the end'.[116] It did not help that the effort to be 'of one's time' could mean an excessive attention to the 'diverse currents of influential but hollow thinking of one's epoch'.[117]

For Weidlé, the nineteenth century novel of ideas degenerated in the post-War years into a novel of ideologies. Once-vital ideas about the social and political realm tended to morph into 'vast networks of formulae'.[118] In all the arts, creative imagination has come to be located, balefully, between Scylla and Charybdis, with matter and animality on the one side, intellectual structures on the other. We currently inhabit a world where scientific and technical intelligence can discern many causal chains, but no nexus of such chains amounts to a view of the whole. We are presented not with a cosmos but with a chaos carrying *elements* of order. Modern chaos is unreason combined with calculation. This is a bad beginning for the artist, since the artwork is *always* a complete cosmos: it is 'total order' and not just order's 'technical or intellectual' equivalent.[119] If the artist feels obliged to reflect the contemporary view of the world, to encapsulate disorder, he will inevitably produce 'copies of the incoherent, simulacra of the absurd', and quite probably seek out, then, 'the monstrous, the abject, and the inhuman'.[120] Picasso had started dislocating bodies in *Demoiselles d'Avignon* long before he set out to represent the militarily dismembered cadavers of his evocation of the bombing of a Basque city in *Guernica*. Visions of destruction or absurdity are 'particular aspects of the vaster vision of chaos' underpinning, for instance, so Weidlé thinks, the entire movement of Expressionism in painting and literature.[121] Tragedies

114 Ibid., p. 294.
115 Ibid., p. 295.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., p. 296.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., p. 297.
120 Ibid., p. 298.
121 Ibid., pp. 299–300.

remain 'in Limbo', on the boundary of Hell, if artists simply reproduce them, rather than allowing an 'order and meaning', however fragile, to stand forth.[122] Reflecting on Robert Musil's novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*,[123] Weidlé is inclined to say that the catastrophes of 1914–1918 only assisted the already underlying chaotic motifs to become evident, for Musil situates his novel (about an 'attribute-less man') at the end of the pre-War peace. The empire of Hell was even then closing in. A greater poet than any of those living had found at the heart of Hell not flame but ice (the reference is of course to Dante).[124] Deprived of love and even, ultimately, of pleasure, even 'libido is in no way burning, it is glacial'.[125]

The night that has come to overshadow the arts is not that 'nocturnal side' of nature which Goethe and the early Romantics prized, the 'benign' or 'tutelary' night of conception and birth. Instead it is a 'restless night, a chaos that is not tempestuous and fertile but inert and seeded with calculations and formulae'.[126] Kafka is its prophet, with his calm, clear, 'almost Mozartian' language set to express 'irresistible oppression, in extinguishable anguish'.[127]

Return to Religion

The work of artists (literary or otherwise) depends on an environing spiritual community, so Weidlé cannot be sanguine about the impact of mere individuals who seek to buck these trends. (The autonomy of individual artists is part of the problem not part of the solution.) The 'community' he has in mind does not have a principally institutional character, so neither can institutions as such recreate this *conditio sine qua non*. Nor, by itself, can the refutation of inadequate theories of art bring about living art. The way out can only be religious – if a religion can be found that will unite logos and mythos again. Were we to take up with strict rigour the exclusive standpoint of art, *which* religion this will be remains an open question. But after sixteen centuries of Christian civilisation in Europe the obvious answer lies close to hand. Weidlé looked in fact to 'a new union between art and religion, between creative imagination and the Christian faith' – along a road which, he thought, Claudel in France and Eliot in England had already pointed out.[128] Though he was able to cite many more names than these, he recognised that problems also abounded: for example, an over-aestheticised view of religion on the

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122 Ibid., p. 300. Weidlé regarded Georges Rouault and Chagall as notable exceptions to this generalisation.

123 Published between 1930 and 1943, the novel was translated into English as *The Man without Qualities* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953–1960).

124 Dante, *Inferno*, canto XXXIV.

125 *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 306.

126 Ibid., p. 309.

127 Ibid., p. 310.

128 Ibid., p. 320.

part of converts (compare Joris-Karl Huysmans) and a tense, not to say, conflicted relation between artists and a Church suspicious of their designs (compare Léon Bloy). And yet despite the inadequate attitudes of the Catholic clergy charted by the painter Maurice Denis (art as diversion or utility), there are signs of a new mutual comprehension – look at the conventual church erected by the Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham (that was English and Anglican, of course) or the chapel of the Dominican nuns at Vence, or the parish church of Assy.[129]

Yet despite the relationship problems of artists and clergy the real difficulty lies elsewhere: in the 'dissolvent thought' that is, like an acid, eating away at the substance of both art and the wider civilisation, and affecting too the manner in which Christianity now exists, for Christianity is becoming, Weidlé feared, less of a spiritual organism and more of an 'ism'.[130] The reunion Weidlé sought would not be achieved if the artist treats his faith as something external to his creative vocation, and imposed on it from without.

Weidlé's view of the modern age is that, while belief in a 'general and unlimited progress' is now relatively rare, there reigns nonetheless the curious conviction of the 'perpetual compatibility of anything whatsoever with what you please': technomania with a humanist culture, general irreligion with a high moral and artistic level, for instance.[131] In fact, art has undergone a deadly separation from its natural sources. Not only has faith in God lessened, so also has faith in man, because the 'man' modernity would divinise is really dehumanised man. The artist who wishes to go beyond the unnatural limits of his time will not find it easy. 'Values once dispersed do not let themselves be reassembled from without: their unity is re-found only by returning to their common origin'.[132] But the first step will be to 'renounce those derisory autonomies in whose name man has pushed God aside'.[133] And again: 'Art is the image of the truth of which religion is the essence and guarantee'.[134]

Weidlé cites a dictum of that extraordinary German Romantic Philipp-Otto Runge to the effect that art may need to be totally despised before it is restored to its rights. Weidlé holds that the anthropometric, naturalistic art of pagan antiquity underwent in the early Christian centuries 'a deep humiliation before what was to be its proper spiritual content'.[135] In the Roman catacombs, images claiming no special artistic value but recalling to believers the essential content of their faith in

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[129] For the 'Great Chapel' at Kelham, a 'great dark space, vaguely Byzantine in style', see A. Mason, *History of the Society of the Sacred Mission* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1993), pp. 154–155; the two French projects mentioned are considered in F. Debuyst, *Le renouveau de l'Art sacré de 1920 à 1962* (Paris: Mame, 1991).

[130] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., pp. 324, 325.

[131] Ibid., p. 335.

[132] Ibid., p. 336.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., p. 339.

[135] Ibid., p. 336.

the simplest visual language made possible the transformation that was to produce the tradition that flowered not only in Byzantium but in the mediaeval West. This is the theme of his study *The Baptism of Art*.[136]

> Not that one finds there a new art and transfigured forms: art is absent there, forms no longer count, the image per se is nothing, only what the image says to us matters; *and it is precisely thus that art had to die in order to be able to rise again.*[137]

How can art save its soul unless it first realises it has lost that soul? For Weidlé the arts today cannot re-find themselves without beginning a new cycle of history. He is talking about religious history, since he holds that 'among the decisive experiences of the spirit the only one that is entirely autonomous is religious experience', all the others are nourished thereby, directly or indirectly.[138] Artistic experience, integrally lived, is rooted in religious experience, and it cannot be indefinitely sustained without the metaphysical support that only religion can give it. Representation as transfiguration; expression as incarnation: how are these hard-won truths of art to be kept vigorously alive except by a religious, indeed a Christian, revival? Transfigured being is at once 'another and itself', and this mysterious law of 'antinomic identity' – seen in art in the way a sign does not only refer to a signified but *is* it, or at least *tends to be* it – is definitively embodied in the Christological (and thus Trinitarian) dogma, where the signs of Jesus's humanity *point to and are* the life of the divine person, the Trinitarian Son, and nowhere else – unless it be in the mystery of the Mass. For Weidlé, the 'little miracle' in art has the same logic as the 'great miracle' of the Eucharistic Presence – presence in the signs of bread and wine of the Trinitarian incarnate Son – even if the affinity of logic is imperfect, owing to an oscillation in the terms (sign/signified) as found in art.[139] We may add that what is true of the productive imagination of the artist will be so, in its own manner, of the receptive imagination of the artist's audience. The American aesthetician William Lynch speaks here of the 'analogical imagination' (both the maker's and the consumer's) which is forever searching after 'some kind of interpenetration of unity and multiplicity, sameness and difference, a kind of interpenetration in terms of which the two contraries become one and the same thing'.[140]

There must be, then, a baptism of art and it will be a baptism of fire. In a passage which reflects the influence of Berdyaev's Existentialism, Weidlé writes:

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136 *The Baptism of Art* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1950).

137 *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 337. Italics are added.

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid., p. 341.

140 W. F. Lynch, S. J., *Christ and Apollo. The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 141.

> When coagulated faith becomes liquid again, when, as in its first age, it becomes love and freedom, it is then that art will be re-warmed again in the new embrasure of spiritual fire and re-find the place that lawfully belongs to it in human existence.[141]

Negative Capability, creative imagination, mythopoetic thought, are, concludes Weidlé, 'aspects' of spiritual activity which manifests itself in living religion, so understood.

> Our European art has lived for centuries separated from the Church but always … in secret communion with the modes of feeling, thinking and conceiving man and the world, by which the Church herself lived, and which the subterranean fire had not ceased to feed.[142]

The artist, no matter how unbelieving, celebrates in his art a mystery whose ultimate *raison d'être* can only be called religious, and to whose metaphysics the Christian dogmas hold the key. In the Incarnation, the infinite is presented with, through, and in the finite. The English poet and critic Charles Williams wrote, 'The Incarnation, had it not been necessary to man's redemption, would have been necessary to his art'.[143]

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[141] *Les abeilles d'Aristée*, op. cit., p. 338.

[142] Ibid., p. 342.

[143] C. Williams, *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 119.

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Conclusion
By Way of an Ending: Religion, Science, Art

It is a rather well-kept secret that in the twentieth century whose end we have now witnessed, science, art, and religion came together in the most remarkable way. That is hardly a common opinion, so why do I make it my own? An explanation will bring us back to basics.

The beginning of the religious impulse is when people say about the world, 'This is how reality is, and it is wonderful'. Not enjoyable, note, because the world, or various segments of it, are not always enjoyable for this or that individual or collectivity. There was nothing enjoyable about the Indian Ocean 'tsunami', one supposes. But nonetheless wonderful, arousing wonder. We could perhaps define wonder as a low-key but pervasive kind of astonishment: astonishment that there is such a thing as reality and that it is of this sort.

Behind religion lies metaphysics, and it has been well said that the most fundamental metaphysical question runs, 'Why is there anything rather than nothing?' What religion adds to metaphysics is a response to this question along the lines of saying, 'There is "anything rather than nothing" because something was meant'. Something was intended. Enjoyable and dreadful, that 'something' is a gift, and a gift implies a Giver. At the ultimate origin, something intelligible was given, and it is wonderful.

That is religion, but what about science and the arts? In the course of the last century the world revealed under the microscope of the natural scientist has profoundly influenced the arts. In 1925 the artist Paul Klee asked, 'Is it not true that even the small step of a glimpse through a microscope reveals to us images we should deem fantastic and over-imaginative if we were to see them somewhere accidentally, and lacked the sense to understand them?' Symmetry, balance, rhythmic sequence, all these were disclosed through cinematographic enlargements of the microscopic: from micro-organisms, through the textures of wood, to the wings of butterflies. By analysing the size, surface, and volume relationships of a wide range of living forms, it can be shown how there is a degree of mathematical orderliness in virtually every realm of organic nature. Klee's Russian contemporary Vassily Kandinsky insisted that by dealing with universal laws of form and structure, his paintings were following along the same path as scientists.

Unfortunately, as the name of Richard Dawkins reminds us, some scientists remain at the mercy of a nineteenth century ideology of materialism, for which organisms are merely very complex machines, their organisation determined by

physical and chemical laws, rather than functional wholes, purposively organised, each more than the sum of its parts. Modern art responsive to the cosmos depends on an appreciation of the qualities of organic life underpinned by this more satisfying holistic biology.

Science, assisted by art, has begun a desirable reaction against the individualism and subjectivism that in Europe must be linked with the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation, weakening the sense of sacramentality as registered in the corporate consciousness, took hold at about the same time that the philosopher René Descartes introduced a radical split between matter and mind, and the coincidence of these two trends in theology and philosophy is significant.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, subject and object had tended to separate entirely, with an apparently unbridgeable chasm between. Objective beauty was denied along with objective goodness and, eventually, objective truth. And this is the process which is being overturned. When science and art come together again, we can see that the universe itself is the ultimate work of art, exhibiting to an astonishing degree the integration of parts within the whole – which was the Church Father St Augustine's definition of beauty. In our capacity to apprehend that, we realise that the world speaks to us of beauty. In Christian language, the world is 'sacramental'. Everywhere around us lies form and structure: music and architecture testify to this as much as do astronomy and physics.

In her own art at its highest, the Church has combined two principles: the principle of artistic beauty and the principle of religious truth. These two orders are in themselves distinct yet they are united in the achieved work of sacred art. In the Christian tradition, one of the lessons of such art will be that creation, theologically understood, is hierarchical. Creation is good as a whole but some elements possess more goodness and beauty than others, with man as the jewel in the crown – as saints and sages bear witness.

George Orwell maintained that under Communism all men are equal but some men are more equal than others. For the Church, all human beings are jewels but some are more jewel-like than others. To recognise the wonder of the world is not by itself enough for us to fulfil the human vocation. We are also, and ineluctably, moral beings who cannot attain their full stature until they acknowledge the call to them to develop the virtues, and to this also the arts are pertinent.

What is the moral stance appropriate to living in so beautiful a world as ours? Surely it is a response of self-oblation – the self-disciplining, self-sacrificial attitude which is required of us before all great works of art if we are genuinely to appreciate them. The arts are or should be an education in the use of the moral imagination. The beauty of the world which the arts focus touches us, and, if we are well disposed by a profound wonder and not merely dilettantism, moves us to live up to our intended nobility as human beings. By their splendour of form the arts can do us this service more efficaciously than does moral didacticism.

In the Roman rite, the antiphon at Lauds for the feast of St Andrew makes in its own way the connexion I have been drawing between beauty and sacrifice when it

recalls the words tradition ascribes to Andrew when approaching his death: 'Hail, precious Cross. Receive the disciple of my Master our Lord Jesus Christ who hung upon you'. The first apostles were moved by beauty: the beauty of Christ's human personality, the beauty of his transfigured body on Thabor, the uncreated beauty of the Holy Spirit whose energies descended at Pentecost and enabled them to find the greatest beauty of all in the sacrificial love Christ showed on the Cross. 'Hail, precious Cross.' The crucifix, which was monstrous to pagans, became, in the history of Christian art, lovingly adorned with all the craftsmanship in line, colour, and even precious stones, with which sacred art could embellish it. According to the message of the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, in the last analysis only love is divinely beautiful.

The saints are the Church's heroes, and they hold out to us the need to shape up: to approximate to some share of heroism in pursuing the good in the struggles and perplexities of every-day life. The arts too cannot leave us just as we are. They intimate an order, a rightness, a harmony, an innocence, or a plea for justice, which is beyond what we can find in the present world, despite its wonder. The flaws of this world, its fragility, its areas of chaos, nowhere more apparent than in human moral experience, invite us to entertain transcendent longings for a realm where all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.

This would be only a dream of the human spirit were it not for the events the Church celebrates faithfully in every Eucharist, events in which the dream was pinned down to earth: blood and earth, tears and sweat, in the atoning suffering for love of a man who did not have to die because he was very God, but did die with absolutely tremendous effect, bringing into being the consummated creation of the world re-founded on his Resurrection.

And this becomes, then, the new vocation of art: in word and music and image to sing the glory that has entered the universe in a Form that outshines the beauty of all other forms, under the microscope, or in the mathematical equations of astrophysics, or in the creative products of natural humanity. The beauty of the crucified and risen Christ outglows the radiance of other beauties in nature and art, but precisely because it is radiant form it also enjoys solidarity with them. It is under the impress of that fundamental conviction that the chapters of this book have been composed.

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Index

Abraham 34
Adam93, 141
Aeschylus 157
Akhmatova, A. 150
Albert the Great 142
Alexandra, tsarina 79
Ambrose of Optino 102
Andersen, H. C. 169
Andrew, apostle 178–9
Anselm 24
Aristotle 118–9
Augustine 9, 24–5, 118, 163, 178

Bacon, R. 148
Balthasar, H. U. von 19, 55, 105, 161, 179
Basil 40
Basil the Fool 102
Baud, F. 110
Baudelaire, C. 3, 163
Bazaine, J. 162
Beatrice 137, 138, 141, 142
Bede 43, 142
Benedict 23
Benedict XIV 23
Benedict XVI 21–35, 43, 45, 66–7, 118, 128–131
Benson, R. H. 38
Berdyaev, N.151–2, 174
Berger, D. 10, 18
Bergson, H. 163
Bernard 127, 135
Bjórnson, B. 168
Blok, A. 150, 155
Bloom, A. 118
Bloy, L. 173
Boccacio 148
Bonaventure 24–5, 143–5, 146
Borromeo, C. 58
Boulanger, N. 131
Bouyer, L. 62
Boyle, L. 21
Bradwardine, T. 148
Britten, B. 163
Bulgakov, S. 92–5, 98, 99, 102, 151

Calvin, J. 12
Cano, M. 39
Carey, M. 62
Carroll, L. 169
Casel, O. 25, 26, 31
Catherine of Alexandria 85
Catherine the Great 85
Cézanne, P. 159
Chagall, M. 151
Cingria, A. 109–110
Claudel, P. 105–115, 155, 172
Clement of Rome 121
Cole, B. 119
Coleridge, S. T. 166
Comper, J. N. 50–3, 60, 62, 63, 64–5, 67, 69
Cram, R. A. 67
Cranach, L. 87
Croce, B. 166
Cyril of Alexandria 13

Dante, A. 135–148, 149, 160
Dawkins, R. 177
Debussy, C.-A. 163
Delalande, D. 123–7, 128
Denis, M. 173
Denys 111–112, 142
Descartes, R. 108, 178
Dionysius, see Denys
Dobszay, L. 127
Dominic 140, 142, 144–5
Drozdov, F. 79
Durandus, W. 57, 64

Eisenstein, S. 150
Elijah 88
Eliot, T. S. 149, 151, 155, 160, 164, 172
Elisabeth of Dijon 19
Elisha 88
Esenin, S. 168
Evdokimov, P. 98–100
Every, G. 149

Fedotov, G. 151
Feuillat, M. 110
Florensky, P. 63, 74, 95–8
Florovsky, G. 76
Folsom, C. 44
Fortescue, A. 45
Foster, K. 141, 147
Fournier, A. 169
Francis of Assisi 113, 140, 142–4
Franklin, S. 81
Freud, S. 170

Gamber, K. 62
Gauguin, P. 168
George, S. 155
Germanus of Constantinople 56
Gilbert, W. S. 16
Gill, E. 110
Giotto 113, 144, 147
Gladstone, W. E. 147–8
Godsalf, G. 37
Goethe, J. W. von 81, 151, 153, 165, 172
Goncharova, N. 87
Gratian 142
Grossetête, R. 148
Guardini, R. 21–35, 63

Hamsun, K. 168
Hardy, T. 168
Hayburn, R. 120–1
Haydn, J. 128
Hegel, G. W. F. 108
Hemingway, E. 154
Herbert, G. 128
Herwegen, I. 25, 26
Honorius III 144
Hugh of St Victor 57
Humbert of Romans 146
Huysmans, J.-K. 173

Innocent III 144
Isaac 34

Joachim of Fiore 145–6
John, evangelist 12
John the Baptist 94
John of Damascus 13, 100–101
John of Parma 146
John Paul II 55, 66
Jonah 112
Jones, D. 20
Jordan, M. 20
Joseph 114
Joseph of Volokolamsk 75–6
Journet, C. 105, 110
Joyce, J. 153, 156
Julian of Speyer 143

Kafka, F. 172
Kandinsky, V. 177
Keats, J. 165–6, 169
Klee, P. 177
Knox, R. 41
Kultepin, M. 87
Kunzler, M. 18

Lang, U. M. 61
Leo I 6
Leo XIII 24
Leonardo 87, 164
Leonov, L. 168
Levering, M. 11
Lewis, C. S. 153
Lossky, V. 102
Lubac, H, de 105
Lucy 137
Luke, evangelist 20, 82, 138, 140
Lynch, W. 174

MacMillan, J. 121
Maksim the Greek 86
Malevich, K. 87
Mallarmé, S. 156
Malraux, A. 151
Mannion, F. 53–4, 59–60, 67, 129
Maria Fyodorovna, tsarina 81
Maritain, J. 105, 110

Mary, Blessed Virgin 49, 72, 78, 82, 91, 92, 94, 95, 97, 99, 114, 137
Matisse, H. 159
Matthew, evangelist 79, 138
Maximus Confessor 56, 57
Meier, R. 49–50, 59
Meierhold, V. 150
Melchisedech 51
Meyendorff, J. 80
Michelangelo 87, 158, 164
Moore, M. 160
Moorman, J. 145
Mozart, W. A. 128
Murillo, B. E. 109
Musil, R. 156, 172

Napoleon I 111
Nekrassov, N. 161
Nesterov, M. 87
Newman, J. H. 68–9, 103–4
Nicholas, saint 21
Nicholas III, pope 145
Nicholas II, tsar 79
Nicholas of Andida 56
Nicholas Cabasilas 56
Nietzsche, F. 167–8
Nikon 84

O'Connell, J. B. 45
Orwell, G. 178
Ouspensky, L. 100–103

Palestrina, G. P. da 122
Paul, apostle 9, 58, 106, 140
Paul VI 39, 40
Paul of Aleppo 77, 79, 80
Pegis, A. 7
Péguy, C. 155
Pepler, H. 110
Peter the Great 77, 80
Peter of Troyes 43
Petrarch 148
Petrova, E. 87
Picasso, P. 159, 171
Pickstock, C. 41
Pilate 111
Pirandello, L. 155
Pius V 30, 37, 40, 42, 44
Pius X 121
Pius XII 6, 16, 39, 122–3
Plato 118–9, 120, 167
Plotinus 120
Poe, E. A. 160, 164–5
Poussin, N. 157
Powys, T. F. 169
Proust, M. 151, 153–4, 156
Pushkin, A. 150

Raphael 87, 109, 164
Ratzinger, J. see Benedict XVI
Ravel, M. 163
Reid, A. 59
Rembrandt 157
Reynolds, B. 147
Reyntiens, P. 67
Richards, I. A. 166–7
Rilke, R. M. 155
Rose, M. 49
Rubens, P. P. 88
Rublev, A. 86, 95
Runge, P.-O. 173
Ruskin, J. 135

Salimbene of Parma 146
Sartre, J.-P. 153–4
Savitsky, K. 82
Schaefer, E. A. 122
Scheeben, M. J. 38
Schiller, J. C. F. 119
Schleussner, family 23
Schloeder, S. 55–9
Scott, C. 117
Scotus 46
Seasoltz, R. K. 56
Seifein, W. 128
Sellars, W. C. 35
Seraphim of Sarov 97, 102
Sergius of Radonezh 102
Seurat, P. 159
Shakespeare, W. 149, 155
Shevzov, V. 51, 72–5, 82
Simon of Cyrene 73
Sinclair, J. D. 135
Sirach 113
Smirnova, E. 88
Socrates 167

Solomon 142
Solov'ev, V. 91
Sosnin, D. 83
Stancliffe, D. 64–5, 66
Stein, G. 169
Steinbeck, J. 154
Stephen, proto-martyr 33, 97
Stevenson, R. L. 168
Stravinsky, I. 163
Suger, abbot 57
Symeon of Thessalonica 56
Symondson, A. 50

Tarasov, O. 75–90
Teilhard de Chardin, P. 33
Tertullian 5
Theodore of Mopsuestia 56
Theodore the Studite 99
Thomas Aquinas 3–20, 21, 25, 108, 142–3, 144, 145, 155
Thomas of Celano 143
Tikhon of Zadonsk 102
Timmermans, F. 169
Titian 164
Tolstoy, L. 100, 161, 168
Trubetskoy, E. 83, 90–2, 103, 152

Undset, S. 168

Vagaggini, C. 4, 16–17, 18–19
Valéry, P. 160, 164
Vasnetsov, V. 87
Verga, G. 168
Vermeer, J. 162
Verne, J. 169
Veronica 78
Virgil 137–8
Vitruvius 58

Waddell, C. 131
Wagner, R. 150
Webbe, L. 37
Weidlé, V. 149–75
Williams, C. 175

Yeatman, R. J. 37

Zelter, C. F. 165
Zola, E. 155